



BY YOSHINO ORIGUCHI
ILLUSTRATED BY Z-ton

MONSTER GIRL DOCTOR

8





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The alraune are asking for Glenn's help. They're so excited that every single one of the girls is dripping nectar from every flower.

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MONSTER GIRL DOCTOR

VOLUME

8

STORY BY

Yoshino Origuchi

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

Z-ton



Seven Seas Entertainment

MONSTER MUSUME NO OISHASAN VOLUME 8

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Prologue: To the East

THE SEA WAS CALM, the water's surface smooth. The sun was warm and inviting. Glenn Litbeit stood on the deck of a sailing ship, taking in the sweet salt-air smell of his home—the human realm. But inside, he was consumed by anxiety.

Two weeks had passed since they'd departed Lindworm. This trip with his fiancées had been nonstop fun, but as they approached his childhood home—and his parents—he'd begun to feel overwhelmed.

"I see it, Doctor," Sapphee said.

Tisalia, standing next to her, squinted into the distance.

The farther east you traveled into the human realm, the more islands there were, necessitating both land and sea transit. Glenn and the others had already transferred boats countless times and were now on a transport ship heading toward the capital—the island of Heian.

"I can't see it," Tisalia finally admitted.

"It must be hard if you're not used to it," Sapphee said.

"The island is only faintly visible." Her expression turned wistful. "I can't believe it's already been...what? Ten years since I was last here?"

"At the doctor's family home...you were a hostage?" Tisalia asked. "I mean, not that I'm judging. Well-to-do centaur families arrange hostage exchanges too."

"Yes." Sapphee closed her eyes as she reminisced. "So many memories. It was a cold, snowy day when I met Glenn."

Glenn remembered that day clearly as well. Since then, he'd run away from home to become a doctor. His parents had essentially disowned him when he left—which had all been part of his brother Souen's secret scheme to get rid of him.

Now Glenn was grown, and he'd somehow accumulated three fiancées in Lindworm.

First was Saphentite, the lamia pharmacist.

Next was Tisalia, the centaur warrior.

The third was Arahnna, the arachne designer.

He'd wanted to write to his parents about his engagements, but Souen had decided—for his own benefit—that Glenn should tell them in person. He didn't feel ready at all. Then again, it was Souen's position and power that had allowed them to reach the human realm in relative safety. Even with all the prejudice against monsters here, Glenn, Sapphee, and the others had been able to travel in comfort and without unnecessary human interaction.

Souen had gone ahead to the capital. The plan was for him to arrive first and prepare their parents for Glenn and his guests. At least, Glenn hoped that was what he was doing. He wanted to believe that his brother would tell his parents peaceably about the trip home and his marriages. But Souen didn't really do anything peaceably.

He couldn't shake the anxiety in the pit of his stomach.

"Sea."

"Wind."

"Sticky."

The fairies on Sapphee's and Tisalia's shoulders started muttering. It seemed they didn't care for the briny air. A few of them hid in Sapphee's hair.

"Are you nervous, Doctor?"

"Well, yeah..."

"But you're just going home."

"That's the problem." Glenn put his head in his hands. "Never mind. Marriage is important. I need to break the news properly to my parents." He tried to tamp down his insecurities, not wanting to look pathetic in front of his fiancées.

"Rest assured," Sapphee said, "I'll greet them in a way that lets them know I'll make a good wife."

"I'll do my best to show them I'm a good wife too!" Tisalia added. "Don't worry!"

Sapphee snorted. "Even though you can't cook or clean?"

Tisalia puffed out her cheeks. "I have Kay and Lorna for that!"

"How does that make you a good wife?!"

“A good wife has good servants!”

“Arg! You are so... Gah!”

Glenn sighed. He knew this sort of banter was just how Sapphee and Tisalia communicated, but the thought of them bickering like this in front of his parents—especially his stern father—twisted his insides.

“Ohhh, it’s been a long time.” Arahnia cut in.

She hugged Glenn from behind. He was still getting used to the sensation of her four-armed embrace.

“What do you mean ‘a long time’?” he asked

“Haven’t I told you?” Arahnia stared across the ocean at the capital. “I’ve traveled the human realm before. As a designer, it was important for me to see human clothes and culture.”

Now that she mentioned it, Arahnia’s designs did have an eastern flair to them. She must have been strongly influenced by the human realm.

“Didn’t you face discrimination in the human realm?” Tisalia asked. “Wasn’t that a problem?”

“Well, to an extent,” Arahnia admitted. “But in the east, monsters are treated sort of like yokai. At the end of the day, you can go about your business without too much trouble.”

“Yokai?”

“That’s right. They have different names for us. Lamia are called ‘wet women,’ and arachne are called ‘weavers.’ It’s true they don’t like us, but you can still walk around town and do what you need to do. You gotta get used to sleeping outside, though.”

“You’re so strong.” Glenn remembered the first time he’d seen Arahnia in the Vivre Mountains. She’d set a trap while camping in order to sketch Illy’s wings. She’d probably learned about human fashion in a similar way.

“It would probably be impossible for you, princess,” Arahnia said.

“You underestimate me!” Tisalia retorted. “Scythia Transportation is a massive company that frequently delivers products to the human realm! We do long-distance freight with caravans, and I just so happen to be very used to making camp on trips!”

“By yourself?”

“O-of course not, but...”

Arahnia flipped her hair back in triumph. Tisalia may have camped with a group before, but Arahnia was far more experienced at striking out on her own.

“Well, it’s not like I came all this way just to study clothing.”

“What does that mean?”

“It’s a secret.” Arahnia chuckled. “Even from the Doc.”

Sapphee slipped away from the conversation before she started to get jealous. She’d felt for some time now that Arahnia was being overly brusque, or at least avoiding being more intimate with Glenn than was necessary. She was probably doing it as a courtesy to Sapphee.

Glenn was about to ask his parents to bless his union to three different people. But in the human realm, monogamy was the norm. Even if he explained that things were different among monsters, there was no guarantee his parents would just accept that. Moreover, the capital city of Heian had no precedent for marriage between even a single monster and a human, though there were people of mixed descent—especially demons—in both realms, and in the remote regions.

Not that that matters...

Glenn was going to continue living in Lindworm, where interspecies marriages were common. He was hoping he could greet his parents with the customary niceties, tell them about his fiancées, and leave.

Souen and Sioux would probably mediate. Souen wanted to marry a demon woman, so he had his own reasons to ensure things went smoothly. And Sioux was good friends with all three of his fiancées, so she’d certainly have something positive to say.

“Arahnia, make sure you’re on your best behavior at the doctor’s family home,” Sapphee admonished.

“Who do you think you’re talking to? I’m an expert at keeping up appearances.”

“Right, but the problem is—”

Sapphee glanced to the stern of the ship, where a green woman lay naked on the deck, basking in the sunlight with all of her leaves spread out.

“Hmm? What? Did you call me?” Aluloona asked, fanning herself.

For some reason, Aluloona had boarded the ship with the servants. Actually, she'd been attached to Glenn and his future wives ever since living in Lindworm. She wasn't doing anything in particular...just enjoying the scenery and telling obscene stories.

“Why is she even here?” Arahnia hissed, crossing her four arms.

“I'm just sightseeing!” Aluloona said.

“I thought you ran away because you have too much work to do!” Sapphee retorted.

“Ingrates!” Aluloona huffed. “Don't mistake me for some idle trophy wife! I'm the benevolent philanthropist of Lindworm's financial affairs!”

“Would you please not call yourself a philanthropist?” Sapphee said, disgusted.

“I really wish you'd concentrate on your work, so we can have delicious vegetables,” Tisalia piped in.

“I've been busy for a while,” Aluloona said. “I thought it would be nice to take a break and see what's happening in the east. Souen said he'd ensured safe passage, so I figured, why not?”

“My brother?” Glenn asked. “When did you—”

“Oh, didn't you know? Souen and I have been doing business together for some time now. Sake and honey sell for a pretty penny in these parts.”

Aluloona owned a large plantation, which probably meant she was selling her specialty products to the humans in bulk. Sake and honey both had long shelf lives, making them well suited to trade and transport.

“And he said he'd take care of my family too,” Aluloona added.

“Family?” Glenn tilted his head. Aluloona was a free spirit. She didn't seem the type to have a family.

Sapphee tapped Glenn on the back with her tail. He leaned his ear in toward her lips.

“She's talking about her daughters.”

Glenn looked at her quizzically.

“Umm, well... Aluloona is actively propagating, so she conceives very quickly.”

“Er?!” Glenn nearly choked at Sapphee’s frankness.

His mentor, Cthulhy, had done some research into infertility, but it wasn’t Glenn’s area of expertise. Conception through sexual intercourse was the natural process he was most familiar with, and medicine was only so effective at interfering with the natural order of such things. But what about someone as sexually active as Aluloona?

“Thirty are still living with her, though she has many more. I believe they work with her.”

“I saw many alraune on the plantation,” Glenn said, “but I didn’t realize they were her daughters! The other side really does live differently.”

While she looked young and voluptuous—maybe even too voluptuous—Aluloona had lived for a long time, and alraune procreation was utterly unfamiliar to humans.

Hmmm...

Sapphee had always tried to adapt to Glenn.

Tisalia had always tried to understand Glenn.

Arahnia knew a lot about the east.

But they were all different species. Like Aluloona, they’d sometimes discuss things completely foreign to Glenn as if they were common knowledge. And Glenn would be married to these women for the rest of his life. While he’d prepared himself for the difficulties that would bring, he wasn’t sure his parents would see it the same way.

“I guess I just have to try...” he resolved.

He could see a large island beyond the ship’s bow. It was Heian, the capital of the human realm, looming especially large among the smaller islands that surrounded it. This was where Glenn had been born and raised, though he hadn’t been back in years.

“It’s time.”

Glenn nodded.

Each of his future wives displayed different emotions. One was nervous, one was stoic, and one was inscrutable.

Only Aluloona seemed completely unbothered, enjoying the sunlight on the deck.

Please let it go well... Glenn prayed silently.

Whenever he thought about his father's stern face, his resolution wavered, but he desperately pushed that feeling aside.

Case 01: Acupuncture Demon

HIEAN WAS THE CAPITAL of the human realm. It was the most prosperous city in the realm: a singular case of a capital that covered an entire island. There was currently a massive construction project underway to make all the streets of Heian conform to a grid, which meant that Glenn and the others were able to disembark at the port and take a single road to the Litbeit home.

Souen had arranged for his subordinates to take their luggage, so they carried only the gifts they'd brought for their hosts.

"It's a strange town, isn't it?" Tisalia muttered to herself as she looked out over the town.

"There are shops...but no fields or factories."

"Yes, the capital is home to the emperor who rules the human realm. The council of statesmen resides here as well, as do their staff, and the marshals, the shop owners... The people who live here are all either nobles or merchants who do business with the nobles. The towns where commonfolk live are scattered throughout the surrounding islands, separate from this place."

One unique characteristic of the human realm was that each city was literally an island unto itself. Heian was the administrative center, and that was where those involved with the central government lived. There was an island for long-term visitors, an island for tourism, another for agriculture, one for industry, and so on.

Aluloona got off at the tourist island. She didn't have any business at the Litbeit home, and felt she'd probably be better off wandering around on her own, though it was hard to believe someone as important as her had come all this way just to go sightseeing.

"So...your family lives here as well?" Tisalia asked.

Glenn nodded.

Sapphee continued, "The Litbeits are prominent figures in the commercial alliance. The doctor's family is in the shipping business."

"Sh-shipping...?"

“In other words, they’re merchants who control all of the ships around here. Since there are so many islands in the human realm, the Litbeits have turned this into a thriving business.”

“Oh, it’s the same as my family!” Tisalia said, clearly pleased.

That was the reason the Litbeits lived in the capital, the seat of power. Shipping destinations were often determined by political needs.

“Yes. You could even call them merchants to His Majesty.”

“Then their position is very similar to Scythia Transportation, the lifeline of Lindworm.”

“True,” Glenn chuckled, “but I haven’t been involved in the business at all.” He was always conscious of the fact that ownership would pass to his brother, Souen. He’d made his choice when he decided to become a doctor specializing in the care of monsters.

“I thought you had a proper upbringing, Doc, but you were actually rich.” Arahnia exclaimed. “I can brag that my husband is out of my league!”

“N-no, that’s not the case.”

Arahnia snickered. “Heh. No need to be modest. Anyhow...I’d heard things were getting better for monsters here, but there’s still a hell of a lot of staring.”

“Of course there is. This is the capital. Almost everyone here hates monsters. Though, I want to believe it’s getting better.”

“You used to live here, Sapphee?”

“I did,” Sapphee answered, “but I barely ever left the house. There was no telling how I’d be treated if I did.” She’d been a hostage, shortly before the war ended. It wasn’t hard to imagine what might happen to a young monster girl walking around Heian at that time.

Everyone here was human—the carriage passengers, the load-bearing workers, the warrior marshals. Those riding in the cattle and horse carriages on the main roads. All of them looked at the monsters as if they were freaks.

Even Glenn stood out in Heian, just by wearing his western-style jacket and tunic. But he didn’t feel like trying to blend in. He wanted to feel like a doctor at all times.

“What is that...a horse body?”

“That’s a centaur.”

“Oh, a monster?”

“Look, there’s one of the wet women and a weaver.”

“Who’s that man?”

“His clothes are weird.”

“Isn’t that the Litbeit boy?”

“You mean Souen?”

“No, dummy. Souen is the older son. There was a child named Glenn in the middle.”

“Why is he dressed like that?”

The people in town weren’t exactly whispering, and Glenn’s group could hear everything they said. But this was the human realm, known for its frank and straightforward nature. Opinions weren’t whispered here, and voicing prejudice against monsters was commonplace.

Arahnia shrugged. “The east never changes.”

“I-I’m sorry...”

“No need for you to apologize, Doc. At least no one’s throwing stones at us. Someday, Skadi will fix this all up for us.”

Glenn nodded. Trade between the east and west had begun, and someday, the discrimination would end. For now, they just needed to say hello to his parents and hightail it back to Lindworm. It was beyond a small-town doctor’s power to change the way the entire human realm thought.

“Did people throw stones at you, Arahnia?” Glenn asked.

“Hmmm, I don’t remember,” she said, embracing him. “All I care about now is whether or not the Doc likes me!”

Glenn smiled, despite the fact that Arahnia’s affection made it difficult to walk. She’d been quite direct with him about her feelings lately. She was normally the least forthcoming of his fiancées, so he was happy to see her expressing how she felt.

“We’re almost there. Off of him now!” Sapphee said sharply.

Arahnia begrudgingly released the doctor—more proof that she genuinely cared about Sapphee’s feelings.

“There you are, Glenn. With your wives,” Souen stood at the front gate of the huge mansion, arms crossed. Uncharacteristically, he was dressed in a formal eastern coat with the family crest.

“We’ve been waiting!” Glenn’s sister, Sioux, was also dressed in eastern attire—an expensive kimono decorated with a hydrangea pattern. The two of them had arrived early to handle all of the preparations for the meeting.

“Sioux, you look adorable!”

“What a wonderful outfit! But you looked good in the patrol team uniform too.”

“Tee hee! Kimonos are hard to move around in, but this is such an important day for Brother! I decided to get all dressed up for once!” Sioux giggled. She wasn’t hiding her horns at that moment, but Sioux, who’d been stricken with Demonitis, knew that she’d never truly be accepted in this realm. She’d seen passersby whispering about how there was a monster or a demon in front of the mansion and the curious stares grow stronger and stronger. She wondered what sort of rumors would soon be doing the rounds.

“Don’t worry. You’re from the distinguished Litbeit family, revered for generations. The grumblings of common folk are nothing to you. Sapphee probably felt the same way when she came here as a hostage.”

“Hmmm...”

The Litbeits held tremendous influence in the human realm, due to their firmly established, generations-old reputation as merchants. Just ask Souen, the current head of the family.

“The east must change,” Souen said. “If not, I will have failed.”

“You’re right,” Glenn said. “I’ll leave that to you, Brother.”

Souen wanted to marry a woman with Demonitis. That was why he’d gotten involved with the council of statesmen, hoping to change the way the east thought about monsters.

“I never intended to leave this work to someone else. That’s why the Litbeit family welcomes monsters in our home.” Souen bowed his head. “So welcome, all of you. Thank you for taking care of my younger brother.”

Sioux bowed as well. Their manners displayed their well-bred

upbringing.

“Obviously, I don’t care about any rumors the common people might spread. Now...” Souen sighed. “Our father, Vaclav Litbeit, is a strict disciplinarian and very sensitive about gossip. But most of all, he dislikes what he considers unreasonable behavior. None of you need to worry, but please be on your best behavior.”

“We know.” Sapphee smiled.

The Litbeit patriarch hated it when unfavorable rumors circulated about his family. This was a natural attitude for a merchant to have, but it meant he’d also been against his son attending the Monster Academy. Glenn’s relationship with the man was strained, to say the least, but he’d have to rein that in for this visit.

Sapphee had once lived in this very mansion herself, Tisalia was a well-brought up lady, and Glenn was sure that his father would like Arahnia—with whom Glenn got along the best—well enough. In other words, it was Glenn’s own actions that would determine Vaclav’s mood.

“Please don’t run away, okay? Doctor?”

He really did want to, though.

Sapphee wrapped her tail around Glenn’s ankles as if she had read his mind. She knew him too well.

“I-I won’t.”

“Really?”

“Really.” Glenn mentally prepared himself.

His father was the family member he got along with least, but that was precisely why he needed to face him. Still, he couldn’t stop the sweat from pouring off his brow.

“I’m here with you, Doctor,” Sapphee whispered in his ear.

Glenn nodded, a nervous expression on his face.



Servants were waiting for them when they entered the mansion.

Glenn remembered each of their faces. They bowed deeply in greeting, which he found mildly off-putting. He'd grown accustomed to life in Lindworm, and he hadn't been treated this way for a long time.

Glenn and the others followed Souen into the house. People in the east took off their shoes indoors, a practice Glenn hadn't followed in a while.

"I'm so sorry," a servant who'd been working for the Litbeit family since Glenn was a child addressed Tisalia. "We ask that centaurs refrain from entering the manor."

Glenn furrowed his brow.

"Lady Tisalia is our guest. Why can't she come in?"

"Little Master Glenn—" The servant used his childhood title.

"Don't call me 'Little Master,'" Glenn said, embarrassed to be called that front of his fiancées. He'd grown out of that title long ago.

"I am so sorry for my rudeness. But her horseshoes will damage the tatami mats."

"Er..." Glenn realized she was right. Homes in the east weren't nearly as sturdy as those in Lindworm. If a heavy centaur wearing horseshoes were to set foot inside, both the mats and the floor would be severely damaged. Not to mention that the holes in the floor would be dangerous for Tisalia.

"That's fine," Tisalia spread her arms, showing not an ounce of anger. "This house wasn't built for monsters. May I go around from the outside? Will you show me the way?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well then, see you soon, Doctor," Tisalia waved her hand nonchalantly. The fact that she didn't let her dissatisfaction show was evidence of *her* upbringing.

"I'm sorry, Tisalia."

"It's fine. I couldn't possibly remove the horseshoes you put on for me."

Horseshoes were secured to the hooves with nails, so they couldn't be removed easily. This sort of problem would never occur in Lindworm.

"It hasn't gotten easier here, has it?" Arahnia observed. "Not that I blame you, Doc."

"Yes, well...I'm still sorry." Glenn frowned.

"Let's get this over with and head back to Lindworm, shall we?"

"Don't be silly. This is your home, Doc."

"That doesn't mean I like it."

The servants looked appalled at his frankness, but Glenn ignored them. Why should he like a place that couldn't accommodate his fiancées?

Souen, who'd been watching everything, sighed. "Make sure you don't say something like that in front of Father."

"I know..." Glenn answered, dejected. He felt childish, but he couldn't help it.

Sapphee and Arahnia giggled together at the sight of their sulking fiancé.

Vaclav Litbeit was nearly sixty years old.

Deep wrinkles lined his face. His body was lean, but he wasn't muscular like a warrior. His dignified expression was more imposing, like a general.

He might not have been qualified to command an army, but he could certainly run a trading company.

"So you made it."

Vaclav had risen through the ranks to lead the eastern commerce alliance through his prowess with martial arts. In this way, he was similar to Tisalia's father, Hephthal. But there was an important difference between the two. Hephthal had started out as a warrior and then chosen to become a merchant. But Vaclav had acquired the discipline of a warrior *in order* to attain his goal of becoming an

influential merchant.

“It’s been a while...Father.”

“Not even a single letter... Never mind. Make sure you say hello to your mother.”

“Yeah...” Glenn’s face was glum. He was in no state to discuss marriage with his parents.

Vaclav sat cross-legged at the head of the table, his arms folded in front of his chest. The impression he radiated—that he wouldn’t listen to anything they had to say—made Glenn uncomfortable.

Souen and Sioux sat on either side of their father. Souen maintained a stern expression, like his father, befitting the nominal head of the household. Sioux had a meek and obedient look, but her body was quivering. Sitting still for long periods of time didn’t suit her.

“It’s been a while, Sapphee. I trust you’ve been in good health?”

“Yes, Mr. Vaclav. I’m enjoying working in the clinic with Dr. Glenn.” Sapphee sat, her tail coiled on the cushion. Arahnia took up a seat on the other side of Glenn, looking graceful.

“And how is your mother?” Glenn’s father asked.

“I have no idea. I left my home behind. I notified her that I’d be getting married, but all she sent in response was a brief letter telling me to be happy. I won’t be returning there.” Sapphee’s voice sounded more sulky than cold. Although it had ultimately been a misunderstanding, she still resented how the Neikes family had introduced poison into the Lindworm canals.

Tisalia opened the shoji door, so that she could sit in the courtyard and join the conversation.

“I must apologize to our guests. I’m sure you’re not accustomed to the east. I am especially sorry for the inconvenience caused to you, Lady Scythia.”

Vaclav’s expression was stern, but he bowed deeply.

“Don’t mention it. I hope to continue our good relationship with the Eastern Trading Company, and I actually don’t mind at all. I’m very pleased to meet you, Mr. Vaclav.”

“And our company appreciates doing business with you.”

Tisalia’s family worked to transport things, while Glenn’s were

merchants—it was only natural they'd had some dealings. Trade between the east and west had been rapidly picking up of late.

“Now, Glenn—”

“Err.”

“Let's hear what you came to say. I've heard a bit from Souen, but I'm ready to hear it from you.”

“Umm...” Glenn looked up.

“I'm going to be married. To Saphentite, Tisalia, and Arahnia. And I want to continue working as a doctor in Lindworm. I came to tell you this in person.”

“Do whatever you want.”

“Uhh...” Glenn had spent so much time mentally preparing himself, but this curt response caught him completely flat-footed. “A-are you sure, Dad?”

“Do you want me to say ‘no’?”

“N-no, it's not that... I just thought you'd be completely against it.”

“Even if I were, I'm sure you wouldn't listen. This is exactly the same as when you declared you were leaving home to go to the Monster Academy. Did you give up then, despite my objections?” Vaclav gazed sharply at Glenn, who shook his head. “Your obstinacy is familiar. If you're not going to listen, then there's no point in wasting my words.”

“Dad—”

“You will call me ‘Father,’ as an educated man should.” Vaclav straightened his posture. “Now, marrying monster girls—and not just one, but several—is not the way we do things here. Your mother was so startled by the news, she had to lie down.”

“That sounds about right...”

“But you don't listen to *anyone*. Even if it was Souen that instigated it, once you decided to go to the academy, there was no changing your mind. Then...” Vaclav paused, as if searching for the precise words. “I read your report about Sioux's treatment.”

“Oh.”

He was talking about the Demonitis findings and

countermeasures.

Glenn had gathered the materials and submitted them to Cthulhy. As to how his father had gotten ahold of them...the only explanation was Souen, who'd frequently traveled between Lindworm and Heian.

Souen's face was a blank mask.

"According to the report, the Litbeits—well, many families in the human realm—are descended from demons. If that's the case, then we're in no position to discriminate under the excuse that we're different species. You should marry who you wish."

"O-oh, thank you..."

"Besides, I suppose this truth will come out sooner or later. Given that Souen plans to take a demon wife, I doubt it will make much difference if his younger brother marries monsters in Lindworm before that."

Souen had told their father more than Glenn had realized. This surprised him. He'd thought his brother's relationship was a secret. But if Souen had spoken to his father about it, then that probably meant he planned to formally announce it to the human realm soon. Souen's dreams were becoming reality, one step at a time.

"I apologize, Father," Souen said, bowing his head.

Vaclav nodded.

"So that's how it is. Do as you like, Glenn. Saphentite, Lady Scythia, please take good care of my son."

Sapphee and Tisalia bowed their heads. Only Arahnia, whose name wasn't mentioned, raised an eyebrow.

"Dad, you—"

"May I ask your name again, Lady Weaver?" Vaclav's expression was unreadable.

"Yes. I am Arahnia Taranterra Arachnida."

"Miss Arahnia, I'm very sorry, but I cannot agree to you marrying my son."

"Er!"

Glenn made to stand.

"Sit down."

He did as he was told. “Er... Dad...”

“I will only say this one more time,” Vaclav looked at Glenn with that sharp gaze he so hated. “I am decidedly against your marriage to Arahnia.”

Glenn could do nothing but clench his teeth at this completely unexpected refusal.

The plum blossoms had just started blooming on a small island with only one village, a short distance from Heian by ship. Glenn, currently on that island, stared at the tiny cluster of buildings from the veranda of the estate where they were staying.

“What do you think?” Souen called out to him as he approached.

“Yeah, it’s nice. Did Saki set this up?”

“That’s right. She’s pretty busy, but she said she wanted to stop by for dinner. Just relax for now”

“Yeah...we can’t stay at home anyway,” Glenn scratched his head. After what his father had said, he didn’t want to stay in the family mansion.

Souen must have seen it coming, because he’d had all the luggage that Glenn and the others brought with them delivered directly to this village. After their conversation with Vaclav, they’d all come here immediately.

“It took a long time to build this place.”

“Really? It doesn’t seem like it would have taken much...”

Souen didn’t reply, but he had a complicated look on his face.

The island was beautiful and bore few traces of human tampering. Despite being so close to the capital, it was almost completely undeveloped. According to Souen, despite its proximity to the center of the human realm, only monsters lived here. This hidden village was his secret.

“This island was negotiated from the duke in order to make trouble.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s the nearest island to Heian, but it can’t grow crops due to the high salt content of the soil. From the perspective of the elder statesmen, this made it useless, so they wanted nothing to do with it. Saki and I have been gathering monsters living in the east and slowly cultivating the land. We still can’t farm, but it’s perfectly livable. We’re using it as a hidden sanctuary.”

Souen said this nonchalantly, but salty soil was a critical issue for agriculture. He must have gone to extraordinary lengths to build this village without anyone noticing in the human realm. It would have been quite the task, even if he technically owned the island.

“But, well, there are only monsters here. There are wet women and weavers too. I’m sure Sapphee and your other fiancées will feel right at home.”

“Yes...” Glenn agreed. As the tatami issue had illustrated, the human realm wasn’t what the monsters were used to. They’d be more comfortable around other monsters.

“Oh, and would you mind making some time to examine the residents? It’s not like anyone here is sick, but we don’t have a doctor. A monster specialist like you is very valuable.”

“Of course.” Glenn nodded. He’d brought enough equipment for basic examinations, figuring his abilities might be needed. He’d never planned to treat this like a vacation.

“And of course, I’ll make sure you’re paid.”

Glenn was stunned. Souen was normally such a miser. He must have truly cared for the monsters living on the island. If only he could have directed some of that kindness to his own siblings.

Without another word, Souen walked away.

He probably had important lord-things to do.

Glenn continued looking out over the village, spotting a young arachne playing with a ball. It was just as Souen had said.

The child ran when she saw him, though. Humans were probably

rare here, so her fear was understandable.

On the other hand...

"There you are, Doctor."

"Sapphee." Glenn looked up as the pharmacist approached.

"Did you go somewhere?"

"Yes. I was examining the fields. I heard that Saki was collecting herbs, so I thought I'd make some medicines to leave here. Ones that will keep for a while."

"You're so thoughtful."

"Incidentally, Tisalia is showing off her spearfishing skills to the kids."

"She finds attention everywhere she goes. How about Arahnia?"

"I don't know," Sapphee said, her expression unchanging. "Maybe she doesn't want to see anyone. Are you concerned?"

"Of course I am. After what my father said... Look, I have no intention of listening to him, but..."

"Honestly, I was ready for him to denounce all of your marriages. But I never expected him to reject only Arahnia."

"It isn't even because of run-of-the-mill human racism, as terrible as that is." Glenn sighed deeply. "It must be because of the Black Widows."

His father's haunting words surfaced in his memory.

"A group known as the Black Widows is currently causing trouble in the capital," Vaclav had explained solemnly. "They claim to be a new religion, and they have been gaining popularity, but they don't share a belief system like Buddhism or Shintoism. They condone stealing and violence and have stolen or set fire to the goods of many merchants here in the capital."

"They just sound like bandits."

"That's right," Vaclav said. "They hide under the mantle of

religion, but they're merely violent thieves. The marshals are pushing back, but so far, they've been unsuccessful. Souen probably knows more about what the council is saying."

Souen nodded. "It goes without saying that sustained violence in Heian is a serious issue, but no one can seem to figure out where the Widows are based. The investigation has hit a dead end."

"So you see, Heian is in an uproar." Vaclav heaved a sigh.

"What does that have to do with my marriage? Arahnia isn't—"

"These Black Widows are acting in the name of their god... Arachnida."

"Whaaa?" Glenn was dumbfounded.

He finally understood the connection to Arahnia, but it was so ridiculous, he couldn't make sense of it. Arahnia's last name was being used in human heresy?

"The group leaves messages for the merchants they rob. Apparently, the things they steal are offerings to this Arachnida."

"Th-that's just a coincidence! Arahnia has been in Lindworm this entire time. There's no way she would be involved in—"

"Outsiders won't see it that way." Vaclav's face remained stoic. "Personally, I don't believe the designer of Loose Silk Sewing has anything to do with this heresy. However, gossip about the Black Widows is only going to worsen from here. I cannot agree to this marriage."

"But..."

Vaclav was right—many people would assume Arahnia and the Widows were connected somehow. Everyone loved a juicy scandal, especially when it meant sullyng the name of a famous merchant family.

"It could disrupt everything Souen's been working for. Marrying monsters is on the cusp of becoming socially acceptable, but if his younger brother were to marry a woman involved with bandits, that would certainly set him back."

"Er..."

"At the very least, it would cause the council of statesmen to investigate the entire Litbeit family, Glenn. You know this. Even the

whisper of an investigation could severely hurt our profits.”

Glenn did know that. It all came down to pride, but Vaclav cared more about his reputation than he did anything else in the world. He knew how important credibility was for a well-established merchant in Heian. Once that trust was broken, the entire family would be out in the cold.

“Even so, it’s just a coincidence! It has nothing to do with Arahnia!”

“You can say it’s a coincidence all you want.” Vaclav’s stern eyes fell on Arahnia, sitting beside Glenn. “But it seems this isn’t news to your beloved weaver.”

“Wha?!” Glenn looked to his betrothed.

Arahnia’s expression was stiff, and not just in reaction to being rejected as a bride. She clearly knew something about this religion.

“Sorry, Doc,” she said. “I never thought it would come to this...”

Her immediate apology could only mean one thing. There was actually a connection between Arahnia and the Black Widows.

Glenn held his head in his hands as he sat on the estate veranda. He’d come here to convince his father. He wasn’t leaving without a solution, but given these complications, he had the feeling they’d be here for a while.

“Doctor, where is Arahnia?”

“I think she’s in her room in the estate. But she won’t see me.” Arahnia had been very quiet after they left.

“She probably just feels awkward,” Sapphee said. “What are you going to do? Defy your father’s wishes and marry her anyway?”

“It would be the academy all over again, and I don’t really want to do that. But I might have no choice,” Glenn said without hesitation.

He knew it would cause problems for his father and brother, but he was prepared to do it anyway. It was rare for the good-natured Glenn to put his own feelings first in this manner, which just went to

show how much he cared for Arahnia.

“Even so, Arahnia’s against it...”

“That makes sense.”

“She said she’s fine with being a mistress, and that she isn’t worth me disobeying my father.”

“I see. And you couldn’t reason with her, so you’re out here on the veranda?”

“Stop reading my mind, Sapphee.” Glenn sighed.

The plum blossoms were beautiful. It was customary in the east to drink sake while viewing the plum or cherry blossoms, though he never personally partook in the custom. He thought about how much he might have enjoyed spending time under the flowers with Sapphee and Arahnia...if circumstances were different.

“Arahnia would probably be more comfortable as a mistress. I think she likes to have fewer responsibilities.”

“Yeah, that sounds like her.”

Arahnia was pretty detached. She liked to do things her own way, and a marriage contract might feel like a shackle. She’d told him any number of times that she was happy being a mistress.

“But that won’t do. I can’t do that.”

“Why not?”

Glenn thought about how to explain it.

Sapphee always called Arahnia her best friend. If that were true, then he had to believe their friendship wouldn’t break easily.

“There was a time when you weren’t around, right?”

“Oh. Y-yes.” Sapphee turned away, as if those words smarted. Her tail was stiff, on alert.

“When that happened, Tisalia and Arahnia saved me. Especially Arahnia, even though she was really busy. She came to cook for me so many times. Without them, I don’t know how I would have made it. I might have even quit being a doctor.”

“Doctor—”

“That’s why I want to take care of Arahnia. I don’t want to think of her as a mistress, or use her for my convenience. I want to marry her

properly,” Glenn declared, staring at the plum blossoms.

He looked at Sapphee timidly as he declared his love for another woman, wondering if she’d be jealous. But she was smiling.

“Thank you, Glenn. I’m glad you think so highly of my friend.”

“You’re not...jealous?”

“Well, a little. But I don’t want to be that kind of wife.” Sapphee stuck out her forked tongue, laughing mischievously.

“So...I’ll marry her. But I still don’t know what to do.”

“Because of the Black Widows? If this new religion is the reason your marriage can’t be blessed, there must be something we can do about it.”

“Yeah.” Glenn sighed deeply again.

There were so many obstacles in his path. He wanted his father to approve his marriage with Arahnia, but he didn’t know how a small-town doctor could go up against an entire religion.

“If only there was a way to make everyone happy...”

“You’re so sweet, Doctor. And also greedy!” Sapphee laughed chidingly.

“What’s wrong with a little greed?” Glenn asked, sulking.

“Everyone, welcome to Souen’s estate.” Saki bowed deeply as they sat before plates of food in the dining room. “It’s not much, but we’d like to celebrate your arrival. Most of these ingredients were harvested here on the island. I hope you enjoy them.”

“We’re grateful for your hospitality, Saki.”

Saki was Souen’s fiancée. Like Sioux, she had Demonitis, transforming her from a human to a demon. Apparently, she was this village’s administrator. She’d also seen to the preparation of this meal, while Souen played host. In addition to mountain vegetables, each guest had been served a stew made of beans, grains, and venison.

“Saki, something’s different about you,” Glenn said. She’d always been mild-mannered, but she seemed even calmer than the last time

Glenn and the others had seen her.

Saki grinned.

"I always feel inferior in the east. When I go outside, I'm constantly looking over my shoulder. But here, there are only demons and monsters. I fit in."

"I see..."

"It's not much, but please, dig in," she prompted.

Glenn started with the mountain vegetables. Sapphee, having spent so much time in the east, was adept at using chopsticks, like Saki and the Litbeits. Only Tisalia was using a fork.

"Sioux hunted the deer for us!"

"I was wondering where she had gone off to..." Glenn let out a sigh. Sioux had grown up into a complete tomboy. Ever since she sprouted horns, his sister had felt more comfortable in this village than she did in their parents' home.

"You're making sake here, too?" Sapphee asked.

There were bottles lined up alongside the trays.

"Yes. One of the residents is a skilled brewer, so we leave it to them. We can't produce much here, but maybe someday, it will make its way out into the wider world. Please, enjoy!"

"I will, thank you!" Sapphee took a sip. "Damn. I wish Arahnia would come down."

She was keeping the seat next to her open, just in case.

"I asked her, but she just said to drop some food by her room later."

"Oh, she did?"

She probably wasn't ready to see anyone yet. It was understandable, but Glenn was still worried.

"Should we make her come?"

"No, Tisalia."

"Okay, okay," Tisalia said, around a mouthful of vegetables.

Glenn didn't want to resort to forcing Arahnia to spend time with them, but he also didn't have any better ideas.

“For now, Saki, can we stay here until Father approves of our marriage? I’ll try to talk to Arahnia too. Of course, we don’t expect to stay for free. I’ll provide examinations for everyone in the village. I came prepared.”

“Naturally, Souen’s brother and his wives are welcome here. We’re going to be family, after all! Please, stay as long as you’d like, and make yourself at home.”

“Thank you very much.” Sapphee and Tisalia were blushing at being called wives. Glenn wished Arahnia could experience it, too. He really never wanted her to be treated like a mistress.

“Glenn, wipe that sourpuss look off your face. It spoils the sake,” Souen said.

“Brother...”

“I understand you’re worried about your weaver, but since when do you care so much about Father’s permission? Just forget about the Black Widows and get married anyway.”

“Well...” Glenn said. “That wouldn’t make Arahnia happy. So I don’t want to.”

In truth, he didn’t want to cause trouble for Vaclav and Souen. He wanted his marriage to be a blessing for his entire family. He still had regrets about the way he’d handled the situation with the academy. He’d never have given up on his dream to become a doctor, but he could have done a better job of maintaining his relationship with his parents.

He didn’t want to make the same mistake again.

“Then maybe you should do what the designer says and take her as a mistress.” Souen said. “Nothing between you has to be different. Especially if that’s what she wants—”

“Souen,” Saki cut him off.

“That’s enough for now. We’re celebrating.”

“I’m saying this *because* it’s a celebration. If he really cares about her, then—”

“Your brother is thinking about *your* position as well, Souen.”

“Who my brother marries has nothing to do with my business!”

Glenn knew they both had his happiness at heart...even Souen,

despite his lack of tact.

“That’s enough!” Sioux burst out, slamming her hand down on the wood flooring. “Are you even capable of enjoying yourselves?”

Souen and Saki both grew quiet.

“Brother!”

“What?”

“Sioux hasn’t forgotten! You said Sioux is to decide your wife. Just as Sioux was ordered, she chose the women with the deepest connection to Brother! That means not only Sapphee, but Lady Tisalia and Lady Arahnia too!”

Glenn hadn’t forgotten. Thanks to the poisoned water incident, Sioux hadn’t exactly selected Glenn’s future wives directly, but she got along well with all three of them.

“Ugh...”

“Sioux can’t do anything about Father’s objection, but every one of Brother’s fiancées is like a sister to Sioux! If my judgment is mistaken, then that’s on you, Brother, for entrusting Sioux with such a task!”

“Okay, okay. You’re right. Let’s set this discussion aside for now,” Souen said. “However, you do need to decide what you’re going to do, Glenn.”

“I know...”

The best thing would probably be to focus on the so-called Black Widows. But not even Souen knew where to find them.

“I know you’re concerned about your family, but blaming each other won’t solve anything.” Tisalia finished her wild vegetables and stood up slowly. “This is brazen of me, but...let’s do some tricks to get this party started! Kay and Lorna...aren’t here right now.”

“That’s okay,” said Sioux. “There is bamboo, Sister Tisalia!”

“Perfect! Now then, with this dagger, I will split the bamboo from top to bottom! Tee hee! By marrying Glenn, I’m not just gaining a husband, but also a cute little sister!”

“I want to train with you again!”

Sioux and Tisalia had become even closer than Glenn had

realized.

“Tisalia, make sure you’re careful on the floor.”

“This estate doesn’t have any tatami, and the floors are sturdy! I already checked with Saki! Now go!”

Tisalia went on to split bamboo in two, snuff candles with a swing of her sword, and perform many other tricks, showing off her skills with a blade.

But no matter how lively things got, Glenn remained glum.

All he could think about was the one person—well, the one arachne—who wasn’t there.

He tossed and turned all night.

Glenn was reading a book when the fairies flew over to him. Sapphee had brought a number of fairies from Lindworm, but since there wasn’t much dairy farming to speak of in the east, she’d renegotiated their contracts so they’d work for one cup of sake each day, instead of milk.

Their tiny little faces were bright red.

“Rubbedy-dub.”

“Dub-dub.”

“Are you all right? You need to go to sleep.”

“Dubbedy-dub.”

“Dooby.”

“You can’t drink anymore.”

Glenn was getting a little worried about the inebriated fairies. Then again, they never got injured or sick, so the drunkenness was probably only temporary.

He watched the fairies fly away and went back to his book.

It was an old eastern fairytale about a spider who turned into a woman...and the man she loved. In the end, the spider betrayed and ate the man, and she was subsequently slain by a passing samurai.

“I shouldn’t have read this.”

It was literally the worst book he could have chosen to read while preoccupied by the situation with Arahnia. The spider girl was probably an arachne living in the east. The story was fiction, but Glenn had the feeling it was based on some truth, even though he didn’t want to believe that such a thing had actually happened. At any rate, it wasn’t helping him fall asleep.

“Ahh...”

It was well past midnight, but he decided to take a walk around the grounds. He was just getting out of bed when a light appeared on the other side of the paper door.

“Hello?” It was Saki’s voice.

Glenn could see the shadow of her horns through the shoji.

“Little brother? I’m sorry to bother you in the middle of the night. Can we talk?”

“Uh... Oh, yeah.” Glenn wondered what she might want as he hurried to close his book.

Saki opened the shoji.

She was wearing a single eastern-styled undergarment, her skin visible through the thin silk fabric. Why was she dressed like that? Glenn thought for a moment that it must be an emergency, but Saki’s expression was as calm as ever. She entered his room and knelt.

“Wh-what is it?”

This woman was betrothed to his brother. Glenn had no idea what to make of this sudden meeting in the middle of the night.

“Since you came all the way here, I wanted to ask you something.”

“Ask me something?”

“I’ve been feeling pain all over my body. I was hoping you could examine me.”

“Well, yes, I can do that, but...” Glenn had a plethora of questions.

“Why so late?”

“I didn’t want to make Souen worry. He’s not the best at

expressing his feelings, but if he knew I wasn't feeling well, he'd start worrying."

"Ahh..." Glenn couldn't imagine his brother ever worrying about anything, but Souen was head over heels in love with Saki. If she said he'd be worried, it must be true. "Can you be more specific about the pain?"

"In my thigh, upper arm, and back. I get especially sharp, shooting pains whenever I crouch down in the fields."

"I see. Perhaps it's muscle fatigue from farm work. Let me take a look."

"Yes, please." Saki removed her undergarment without any hesitation.

It was so sudden and so quick that Glenn didn't have time to stop her. Her torso was exposed. She was sticking her chest out, and he could see her stomach as well. Flustered, he scrambled to cover her up.

"Oh, er, um! Saki, you don't need to remove your clothing!"

"Oh, really? But for the exam—"

"The examination method is quite different from the eastern way. I may need you to be undressed at some point, but not right now," Glenn explained hastily.

Most doctors in the east required patients to remove their clothing for all examinations. It wasn't anything inappropriate; it was just the custom. But all he felt in that moment was guilt for seeing his brother's fiancée naked.

"Please, relax. I'm going to start with a physical exam."

"Yes, thank you very much, little brother," Saki said as she donned her undergarment again.

Though her demeanor was calm, her eyes were serious. She'd always been a closed book, but now Glenn found her expression downright scary.

He pushed the thought aside and started the examination.

"You're very tight," he said, touching Saki, who was now lying on the mattress.

She'd developed the firm muscles characteristic of demons on her calves, thighs, and back. But they were all tense.

“Is it what you suspected?”

“Demons are blessed with muscular strength. But the tightness... The work you’re doing in the fields must be harsh.” Glenn observed as he rubbed her thigh.

She was only wearing the short undergarment, so her thighs were exposed—in fact, he thought he could probably see more if he tried. The women in the east didn’t typically wear underpants. Glenn did his best to push away thoughts of his brother’s fiancée’s naked body under the thin fabric.

Saki was coming to him for help. It might be the middle of the night, but Glenn focused on his mission as a doctor.

“We’ve finally been able to harvest more crops from the fields lately. However, the soil is hard and overgrown with weeds, so we had to use our superhuman strength to plow the ground. We were only able to do it because everyone here is a monster.”

“Have you ever had a fever?”

Sioux got fevers when she overexerted herself. Demons overheated much quicker than humans when they engaged in rigorous physical activity. Since Saki was a demon too, it would make sense if she experienced the same symptoms.

“Hee hee. Brother, it’s already been fifteen years since I turned into a demon. It was rough at first, but now I know how to use my body so that I don’t get fevers.”

“Oh, well, if that’s the case, then it’s fine,” Glenn said, wondering how old Saki was.

She looked very young. But Demonitis was known to manifest between the ages of twelve and sixteen. The horns appeared during puberty. That would make Saki around thirty, which was older than Souen.

“Brother, are you wondering about me?”

“Yes. Of course I am. You’re going to be my sister-in-law.”

“Well, it’s not certain yet. I had to leave my family because of my Demonitis. Who knows if Souen will really stay with me forever...”

“No.” Glenn shook his head. “Once my brother makes up his mind, there’s no changing it. For better or worse.”

“Well, little brother, you do know him well.” Saki sounded impressed as she lay sprawled out on the mattress.

“Anyway, it seems like your muscles are just stiff from the long-term effects of exertion.”

“Is that so?”

“Incidentally, what did you do today?”

“I was mostly weeding in the fields. I also picked mountain vegetables.”

“I see.”

So it had been heavy labor. She’d probably done this to feed Glenn and the others. He felt a new level of gratitude for her.

“It would be best if I could give you a massage, but...the stiffness is really quite severe. Chiropractic isn’t my specialty. I might not be able to get in deep enough.”

“Is that so? Souen told me that his brother is the best doctor in Lindworm.”

“I’m quite sure my brother would never praise me like that.” He appreciated Saki’s kind words, but they were a little much. “I think it would be better if a proper eastern masseuse looked at you.”

“I’m sorry, little brother, but no masseuse here would want to work on me. They’d be criticized if they took on a demon client.”

“Oh, right...” Glenn held his head in his hands.

It was discrimination. Illness and injury didn’t see species or creed, but that wasn’t true for humans. Glenn thought about how hard it must be for people who became demons.

If he were to leave the reforms of the human realm to his older brother...

“I’ll have to do it.”

“If you prefer not to massage me, how about needles?”

“Needles?”

“Yes. Souen is studying it right now. Sometimes he practices on himself.”

Glenn groaned.

Treatment using needles... In the human realm, they called it acupuncture. Very thin needles, which didn't cause pain, were inserted into the muscles to relieve tension. They simultaneously promoted circulation, treated fatigue, and also improved the flow of chi.

However, Glenn was skeptical about acupuncture. Just like sorcery in the west, Cthulhy's techniques didn't recognize the existence of eastern chi. She disliked the idea of conditioning the body by adjusting something she couldn't see.

Therefore...

"I'm sorry. I've studied acupuncture, but I've never practiced it. I'm not very experienced."

"But you have the knowledge, right? That's fine with me. Otherwise, I'll just continue to be in unbearable pain." Saki frowned.

"Okay, then..." Glenn shook off his doubts. He couldn't very well let his sister-in-law suffer. It was his job to get rid of the pain. He might not have learned eastern medicine from Cthulhy, but he'd studied a fair amount of literature on the subject. "Are the needles in my brother's room?"

"No, I brought a set with me."

"Huh?" Glenn was confused.

Saki stood up and put her hand to the breast of her undergarment. Without hesitation, she exposed her chest. Flustered, Glenn averted his eyes. Saki took out a folded piece of cloth. Glenn wondered where in the world she'd been keeping it.

"Here you are, little brother." Saki grinned.

Glenn took the cloth. It was still warm. It must have been touching Saki's skin directly. He opened it to find dozens of very, very thin needles, lined up neatly.

"What is it?" Saki asked, almost seeming to hope Glenn was excited by the sight of the needles.

"Oh, nothing." Glenn shook his head, not realizing what she was really asking. "You're just so prepared."

Saki was kind and cultured—Souen would never be with anyone who wasn't. She wouldn't try to manipulate Glenn. All he could do now was to quietly continue with the treatment.

“I’ll prepare the disinfectant,” he said.

He sanitized the needles, then returned to Saki, who was lying down again. Her undergarment was still open, her chest exposed.

Normally, only the area being treated needed to be exposed, but this seemed to be more comfortable for Saki.

“Thank you,” she said.

Glenn nodded.

Acupuncture focused on pressure points, like the reflexology methods he’d used on Kunai in the past. All he needed to do was insert the needles in the proper positions at the proper angles. The needles Saki had provided shouldn’t cause any pain.

Glenn calmly proceeded with the treatment. While he worked, he took care to not be distracted by his half-naked soon-to-be sister-in-law.

“Now, I will insert the needles in order.”

“Yes...”

He concentrated, slowly inserting each disinfected needle.

“Ahh!” Saki let out a coquettish cry. Her body quivered.

“Did that hurt?”

“N-no, it’s fine. It looks like I’m just a little sensitive.”

“I’m sorry. Normally, acupuncture needles shouldn’t hurt, but I’ll try to be careful.” Glenn knew he’d inserted that needle skillfully. Even if she had a strange skin sensitivity, it shouldn’t have been enough to make her cry out.

Are the needles too effective? Is that possible?

He started with the next one, slowly and carefully inserting it into Saki’s skin.

“Ahh, mmm!” Saki was quivering again. It didn’t sound painful, but her reaction was a bit excessive.

“Saki, could you try to keep your voice down?”

Eastern homes didn’t have separate rooms like they did in the west. Massive estates were divided up using only paper sliding doors, called shoji. It was perfectly possible that voices in Glenn’s room could

be heard in Sapphee's and Tisalia's rooms.

“Oh, oh, yes. I'm so sorry...” Saki said, panting. She only had two needles in her so far.



I know I've never performed acupuncture before, but why such a dramatic reaction?

Maybe Saki was reacting this way because her exhaustion was so severe?

"I'll keep going." Glenn proceeded, hesitantly.

"Mmm! Oh, ahh! Mmm! Ohh!"

"S-Saki..."

Each time Glenn inserted another needle, Saki's body reacted.

"I-I'm sorry! I'm trying to hold back but...your hands... Oh, they're so good..."

"If I were *truly* good, then you wouldn't feel the needles..."

"I-I'mmm sorry..." She was now having trouble speaking.

Glenn continued with the procedure.

"Mmm, oof! Ahh, ahhh! Hmmm...!"

"Saki, people can hear you..."

"Oh, I-I didn't know you would go so far...!" Saki's words could easily be misinterpreted.

All Glenn could think about was trying to finish as quickly as possible. He didn't want to think about what might happen if Sapphee or his brother overheard.

Just because Souen wasn't married to Saki yet didn't mean he wouldn't slaughter Glenn in cold blood.

"Tee hee... I'm still tight, aren't I, little brother? Please continue?"

Glenn thought she was referring to the muscles on her back, but she was lying on her stomach, her face turned toward him with a dubious smile. He had no idea what she was thinking. He'd thought the excessive reactions were due to Saki's severe fatigue, but maybe there was another reason?

Glenn felt like a fornicator, even though he hadn't done anything.

"Saki...are you teasing me?"

"No, I wouldn't do such a... Ahh... Oh, little brother...therrre."

"Hmmm?" Glenn was perplexed as he inserted the needles.

He didn't know what Saki's goal here was, but he didn't believe she'd intentionally or maliciously entice him. Souen wouldn't have gotten engaged to such a vixen. Glenn's brother possessed a twisted nature. He was always scheming. But this meant that he'd never choose to be with a woman who didn't have his best interests in mind.

Glenn trusted Souen's judgment.

"If it hurts, or you feel uncomfortable, please tell me. If you don't, then the treatment might not work."

"Oh, mmm. That...feels so good. It really does."

"Well, good." Glenn took this as a sign the needles were working.

Saki was now breathing more evenly, proof that her muscles were relaxing. He didn't miss the flirtatious moaning.

"Hmmm... I'm so sorry. Mmm, ahhh...!"

"I need you to trust me, Saki," Glenn said.

"Just one last needle."

"Y-yes, the last... Mmm, ahhh, oh, so rough..."

Glenn inserted the final needle into Saki's back, defeated.

There was no resistance as it slid into Saki's skin.

"Ah! Ahhh! Ahhhmmm!" Saki let out a loud moan.

Far too loud. It wasn't just flirtatious by anyone's definition, this time—it sounded like an act. It was so loud that he was sure everyone in the building—Sapphee, Tisalia, and even Souen—had heard her.

He was right. The patter of footsteps moved quickly down the hall. Since it wasn't hooves or slithering, this could only mean one thing.

"Saki! Glenn!" Souen threw open the shoji and rushed into the room. "What in the world are you two doing?!"

He took in the scene before him, and froze. Saki's loud moans had to have alarmed him enough, but nothing could have prepared him to witness a full-fledged acupuncture clinic in progress.

"What are you doing?"

"Can't you see? He's treating me," Saki said, laughing softly.

Glenn suddenly realized that this had been her plan all along.

“I could ask you the same question. Just what do you think *you’re* doing, Souen?” the graceful demon asked, propping herself up on her elbows.

Clearly, her plan had been successful.

“You’re in the wrong here, Souen.”

For some reason, Souen had been forced to kneel in Glenn’s room, his back straight as a rod. Saki, her treatment complete, now stood tall, arms folded across her chest. She was smiling, but her fiancé’s face was full of dismay.

Glenn felt awkward too. If this hadn’t been his room, he would have fled the scene.

“Did you think Glenn and I were doing something we shouldn’t? Do you have such little trust in your fiancée and brother?”

“N-no, of course not... But how could anyone help but think something untoward was going on after hearing those sounds?! My dear...you’re the most important thing to me in the world.”

“Your fiancée is important? Well, I should hope so.” Saki wasn’t backing down. “Your fiancée *should* be the most important person to you. But do you remember what you said at dinner? You told Glenn that Arahnia could just be his mistress. You said that would be fine if that’s what she wants.”

“Ergh.”

In that moment, Glenn felt genuine admiration for Saki. As far as he knew, Souen had never lost an argument to *anyone*. But Saki wasn’t tolerating any backtalk, and she’d backed Souen into a corner with no fear at all of being accused of cheating.

“You told Glenn to take his fiancée as a mistress. Would you allow the same for me? If I become your mistress and not your wife, then you have no right to tell me what I can or can’t do, even with your own brother.”

“That’s not what I—”

“It’s fine with me. Demons can’t get marriage licenses, anyway.

I'm sure my life would be much easier if I were to live in Lindworm with your little brother instead of marrying you here. And he's just so cute too." Saki slipped her arms around Glenn's shoulders.

Her warm breath tickled his ears as her face drew close. Glenn felt instinctively like he was in danger...like he might be about to be murdered by his own brother.

"Ergh... Grr..." Souen clenched his teeth, his posture still perfect, though he was shaking with humiliation. "I'm sorry, Glenn." He faced his brother and put his hands on the floor, bowing deeply.

"B-Brother?!"

This was the deepest show of apology one could make in the east.

"I sincerely apologize for what I said at dinner."

"I-it's okay. You had a valid point, and...you're freaking me out by bowing like that!"

"No, I was wrong. Please, forgive me!"

Glenn had begun sweating profusely. He was merely a pawn in this marital feud. Saki had both of them wrapped around her little finger.

"I also owe you an apology." Saki moved next to Souen and bowed to Glenn as well. "I'm very sorry for using you in my plan to teach Souen a lesson."

"N-no, it's fine. And your muscles really were quite stiff. The treatment was necessary."

"I appreciate your understanding." Saki smiled. "Thanks to you, my back feels much better now. You really are an excellent doctor."

"I wouldn't go that far."

"I hope you'll treat me again, if the opportunity arises."

Saki had used her very real muscular fatigue to remonstrate Souen. Glenn was more convinced than ever that his brother needed this woman in his life.

"Glenn..." Souen had a serious look on his face. "I wouldn't call this a testament to my regret, but I have come to a decision."

"What?"

"I will find a way to make Father approve of your fiancées.

I'd thought that his approval was unnecessary, but I see now that I was wrong. I will help you in any way I can."

"Huh? No, don't worry about it, Brother!" Glenn said, reflexively. "I don't want to be indebted to you!"

Saki looked to Souen, as if to ask what he might have done in the past to possibly warrant this reaction.

But Souen was unfazed.

"This is my apology. I'm repaying a debt to you."

"How will you accomplish this?"

"I'll figure something out. Please, let me help you, Glenn. Otherwise..." Souen glanced over at Saki. "I really think Saki will leave me for you."

Glenn was stunned. As far as he was concerned, Saki and Souen were perfect together...but Souen was clearly afraid of losing her. Perhaps it wasn't so very different from the way Glenn just knew he couldn't take Arahnia as a mere mistress.

For the first time, he realized that he and his brother were alike.

He still couldn't figure out exactly what thoughts Saki was hiding behind her smile, but he admired her.

Sapphee found Glenn on the veranda the next morning. "It sounds like you had fun last night."

Glenn froze. "Well, I—"

"Relax. Saki told me everything before she did it."

"She did?!" Glenn had been worried the entire time that Sapphee would hear them from the next room.

"She told Tisalia too. Otherwise, we would have burst in as soon as we heard her voice...to take care of it."

Glenn couldn't bring himself to ask what, exactly, she meant by this.

"Y-yeah...seriously, nothing happened."

“I know. I was watching everything through the shoji.”

It seemed Sapphee had been in on everything, though Glenn wasn't sure how he felt about that.

“You did nothing more than help out a family member. And it sounds like Souen is going to help you now.”

“Yes...I'm not sure what he's going to do yet, but it's comforting to know he's on my side.”

Souen had a strong personality, and he always got what he wanted. If he said he'd do something, it would get done.

“That's good to hear. I don't exactly agree with Saki's tactics, but I certainly learned a lot. It's important to keep a tight rein on your husband.”

“Well, I could never go against you, Sapphee...”

“Is that so? You have so many callers! You're lucky I'm not the jealous type, Dr. Glenn,” Sapphee said nonchalantly. Glenn didn't even want to imagine the expression she must have worn while he was treating Saki.

“Anyway,” he said. “I'm going to need your help to have my marriage to Arahnia approved.”

“Speaking of whom... Hey, Arahnia!” Sapphee called out.

“Huh?”

Glenn followed his pharmacist's gaze up to the roof of the house, where a familiar woman with black hair hung from the rain gutter.

“You're truly undefeatable, Sapphee.” Arahnia wore an awkward expression, but she made her way down from the roof.

“W-were you up there the entire time?”

“Well, I knew that no one but you could find me here, so I figured it was a good place to do some thinking. But I was a bit surprised by the voices I heard last night.” Arahnia folded her four arms, looking a bit flustered.

“That was Saki's fault,” Glenn said.

“I-I know. I heard all of it...to the very end.”

Arahnia gazed off into the distance.

The town had a lovely view of the sea and, in the distance, Heian,

the capital of the human realm and the closest populated island.

“You sure do have an appetite, Doc. Saying you want me, even though you already have Sapphee and Tisalia. Still...” Arahnia’s expression had turned somber. “I wonder... Could you possibly forgive me?”

“For what? My father’s concern is the Black Widows. The deity of this new religion is someone named Arachnida. There’s no way it has anything to do with—”

“What if I told you it *does* have to do with me?”

Glenn froze.

Arahnia was smiling now.

“I never told you, Doc. When I came to the east, it wasn’t just to study design. I was also searching for my mother.”

“Your mother?”

“My mother is a thief. She swindles men, leads groups of bandits, takes whatever she wants. I decided to find her and give her an ultimatum, so I came east. But in the end. I couldn’t find her.” Arahnia flipped her hair back, “My mother is still here somewhere. It’s possible that she created the Black Widows. That would explain the Arachnida name.”

Glenn gulped. He glanced over at Sapphee, but she didn’t look surprised. She’d already known.

“I am almost positive that my mother is involved,” Arahnia continued. “But if that’s the case, then I’m an accomplice. I can’t be forgiven.”

“B-but, that...” Glenn couldn’t find the right words.

“Doc, please don’t go to all that trouble just for me,” Arahnia said sadly, cupping his face with her four hands.

Case 02: The Pollinating Alraune

WITH THE ISSUE of Arahnia and the Black Widows still up in the air, Glenn set up a temporary clinic in Souen's villa. Sapphee and the fairies would help him provide treatment for the monsters of the village. Since the residents had come here to hide from humans, he was worried they wouldn't trust him, but Saki explained to them that he was Souen's brother, and they warmed up to him rather quickly.

There were about fifty monsters living in the village altogether.

About half were former humans who had Demonitis. The rest were lamia, arachne, harpies, and mermaids. All of them had faced discrimination, and all of them were species known in the east by eastern names, with different scale patterns and feather coloring from their counterparts in the west. It was clear to Glenn that they were subspecies that had evolved separately.

He examined a demon who'd been injured in a deer attack and nursed a lamia child with a fever. After treating several cases, he began to gain a reputation as a capable doctor. Souen's younger brother, the monster specialist, became the trusted physician of the village in the blink of an eye. He wrote a letter to Cthulhy to tell her about his success and inform her that he'd be unable to reopen the Lindworm clinic for a while.

He'd also been thinking about how to get his father to accept Arahnia.

"Glenn, I've been thinking," Souen said, over some of the east's famous soba.

It was lunchtime. Saki had made the soba by hand, and she sat with them out on the veranda, as was eastern tradition. Sapphee and Tisalia were there as well. Unskilled with chopsticks, Tisalia was using a fork, which looked strange.

Arahnia was nowhere to be found. Glenn didn't know if she was in her room or up on the roof again, but she was still avoiding him, and she looked away awkwardly whenever their eyes *did* happen to meet.

"I think the only way to get Father's permission is to ease his concerns about the Black Widows," Souen said.

"That's what I figured."

"It's causing problems for the people of Heian anyway," Souen said, slurping his noodles.

"Father believes that the human realm will change eventually. People with Demonitis will be accepted, as will marriage to monsters, and trade with the west will progress. That's what the world will become."

"No, you're going to *make* that world, Brother."

"That's right. That's why Father doesn't object to your marriage at this point." Souen proceeded to drink every last drop of the soba soup. It was high in sodium, and Glenn thought it must be bad for his health.

"Father's only concern is that it will lead to false rumors about the Litbeit family. Of course, I won't do anything that would affect business."

"But Souen, all you do is look at the books," Saki said coldly as she cleared the table.

Souen furrowed his brow.

"Saki's right. Father is concerned about that too. Even if the business is unaffected, he probably wants to avoid damage to his reputation."

"I see."

Vaclav was always talking about how important credibility was for trade. He hated the prospect of a bad reputation, which would damage his business in the long term.

Glenn was a simple town doctor. He didn't think the Black Widows could do anything to *him*. Or at least, not to his reputation. According to the rumors, they were a violent group of bandits.

"If they're committing robberies in Heian, why isn't the council of statesmen doing anything?"

"They're trying," Souen said heavily. "Even *I*'ve been given

orders...”

Glenn wondered when he'd become so powerful in the eastern administration. When Souen said he'd do something about the Black Widows, had he meant that he'd lean on his political connections?

“However, they haven't found a single thing in terms of a base of operations. You'd think we'd at least be able to uncover some sort of regular ceremony, since they're calling themselves a religion.”

“Is it possible they don't have gatherings? I mean, bandits form a band to *attack*, don't they?”

“It's other way around,” Souen said. “They aren't forming up and then setting out to rob people; they only come together at the houses of merchants they've already planned to rob. While the victims are scrambling to counter the attack, they steal whatever they came for and then scatter like newly hatched spiders, darting off in all directions. That's why no one can figure out where their base is.”

“They can do that?”

“That's what they *are* doing,” Souen ground his teeth, utterly exasperated. “The fact that they can move with such coordination proves they must have a base! If they don't train together, then how could they attack with such precision?”

“Hmmm...” Tisalia, who was draped gracefully on the veranda, nodded as she wiped her mouth with her napkin. “I train with my attendants. Kay and Lorna are always training too. That's why we fight so smoothly together.”

“And new religions need a sense of unity,” Sapphee added. “Some monster assassin organizations will even use drugs to induce group hallucinations. The Neikes don't do such things, but a sense of unity, even just through shared living spaces or ceremonies, is vital for antisocial groups. Doubly so for religions.”

“Which means they must have some means of unifying themselves, or at least communicating. We just don't know what it is yet.” Souen looked contemplative.

Very few people could match Souen in either intellect or cunning. Glenn was beginning to realize the Black Widows weren't your average bandits. Arahnia might know something. She'd guessed that the Black Widows were connected to her mother after all. But he didn't want to

give Souen or his father more ammunition against his fiancée.

“If we can’t chase them down, then we need to bring them to us.”

“H-huh?”

“Apparently, the group goes after rare items. They especially like things from the monster realm. Fortunately, we have Sioux, Saki, and Tisalia. I say we use them to lure the group out and catch them all in one go.”

“Whaaat?” Glenn grimaced.

It was a dangerous plan, exactly the kind of thing Souen liked.

“Yes! We’ll call out those crafty bandits and get ’em in one blow!” Tisalia exclaimed. “It’s perfect!”

“The princess seems to be overflowing with vigilantism. What do you have in mind?” Sapphee asked bitterly.

“I don’t know yet,” Souen said honestly and somberly.

“I’ll think of something,” Glenn said. “We need rare items related to monsters...right?”

“Please.” Souen’s answer was curt.

Glenn pondered as he stacked the soba dishes. His brother had never asked anything of him. But wherever Saki was involved, Souen’s pride seemed to fall by the wayside.

“Heeey.”

He heard a voice he knew. It was a low, flirtatious voice, nonchalant in tone, though even that simple greeting oozed charisma.

Glenn looked up to see a massive bulb being borne on the shoulders of male monsters.

“Aluloona?!”

“Hmph! Do you know how hard long trips are on the elderly?” The alraune had separated from the group after they’d arrived in the human realm. She’d said she’d be off sightseeing, but instead, she was here.

Her escorts heaved in unison and set the massive bulb down on the ground. Though flowers bloomed all along the edges of the bulb, Aluloona’s naked green flesh was showing.

“I’m sorry to make you wait, farmer.”

“You can call me Aluloona. You must be Master Souen. Mmm, you have a nice face, don’t you?”

Glenn didn’t know what to make of this.

Aluloona laughed. Souen glanced over at Glenn, one eyebrow raised.

“Didn’t you hear, Glenn?” the alraune asked. “I’ve decided to take a break from my family trip to stay in this village for a little while. There aren’t many inns that will take us, since my family is...quite large.”

Glenn tilted his head. “How large?”

From the other side of the villa, Aluloona’s servants brought over more bulbs—about half the size of Aluloona’s—one after another. Soon there were ten, then twenty, with no end in sight.

Pop, pop, pop! The bulbs began to bloom, and dozens of alraune with the same body structure as Aluloona appeared.

Glenn hurried to cover his mouth and nose against the aphrodisiac that alraune produced. He’d lost his free will to this intoxicating pollen when Aluloona had pursued him in the past.

“Mom, are we here?”

“This is a nice village. The plum blossoms are pretty.”

“The boys are pretty, too.”

“Yes, the boys.”

“Is this your first time meeting the doctor?”

“Such a cute kid. Oh, how about this good-looking man?”

“Tee hee! Boys.”

“Boys!”

“I love it when there are boys around.”

“Hey, we just got here! Settle down!”

There were now about thirty blossoming bulbs. They were all the spitting image of Aluloona, but smaller. Even their faces looked just like her. Insect- and plant-type monsters had body structures that differed greatly from that of humans, and it was typically difficult to tell them apart.

Even so, the resemblance here was striking. They must all be her sisters, or—

“Sorry they’re so loud. These are my daughters.”

“Daughters...” Glenn remembered what Sapphee had said. Aluloona had many children.

“We’ll be here for a bit, Souen. Tee hee hee!”

Souen bowed his head without saying a word, apparently amenable to this. Aluloona’s daughters were whispering among themselves, all of them looking hungrily at either Glenn or Souen...in other words, at the only men there.

“The girls share my personality too,” Aluloona declared, without a hint of apology.

She was probably referring to her appreciation for men. But her daughters’ gazes already provided more than enough evidence to draw that conclusion.

“Er...”

Sapphee wrapped her tail around Glenn’s torso, glaring at Aluloona’s daughters.

“Er...”

“Tee hee!”

The alraune family continued to laugh, unconcerned by Sapphee’s gaze.

“Now then, Lindworm Farmer Aluloona...” Souen formally greeted her, offering her tea, which she accepted with an outstretched vine. “My name is Souen Litbeit. We’ve done business together, but this is the first time we’ve met in person.”

“Mmm, indeed. You’re quite handsome.” Aluloona wasted no time, using one of her vines to stroke Souen’s cheek.

Sapphee put a hand to her forehead and sighed. This was just like Aluloona.

“Now, Master, are you interested in joining my harem?”

“Ha ha! It’s certainly a tempting offer, but I don’t think my fiancée would approve, and she’s not the kind of woman you want to give a polearm to. So I’ll be going now.” Souen seemed cool and collected, but

Glenn was beside himself.

He was especially surprised to see that Saki, standing behind Souen, really *was* carrying a polearm. The blade was sheathed, but it was still incredibly dangerous. His brother's fiancée was a frightening woman. As for Souen himself—though he was smiling, he clearly didn't think highly of Aluloona.

"Well, that's a disappointment," the alraune said.

"It's my pleasure to welcome you to this village, though, Aluloona the alraune."

"Mmm. My daughters and I appreciate your hospitality. And I should let you know that we don't require any food. We live off of water and sunlight. We couldn't just barge in here with a group this big and demand to be fed!"

"I apologize. As you can see, this is a very small village."

There weren't many places where monsters could feel safe in the human realm. Even a village of this size would be far more comfortable than just about anywhere else.

Aluloona fanned herself coquettishly.

"And look at that. The young doctor is still here. I thought you'd have finished notifying your parents of your marriages by now."

"Well, about that... We haven't quite gotten permission yet."

"Hmm?"

Aluloona tilted her head.

"Dr. Glenn, maybe you should try talking to Aluloona," Sapphee whispered. "She's close with Arahnia and, well...she may be boy-crazy, but she's been around for a long time. She probably has some useful knowledge."

"Y-yes."

Glenn followed Sapphee's advice and explained the situation to Aluloona. He told her about the Black Widows and his father's concerns. The only thing he left out was the bit about Arahnia's mother.

"Hmm. I've heard rumors about the Black Widows. Apparently, they're mostly active in Heian."

"I apologize that you had to hear such unpleasant things,

Aluloona,” Souen said.

“Why, Master Souen, you’re far too handsome to grovel before authority figures in this way.”

This made Saki burst out laughing. Souen looked like he’d been punched in the gut.

“Now then, you said you’re looking for a way to lure the Black Widows out of hiding?”

“Y-yes.”

“Well, since it’s spring, the alraune will be pollinating soon. My family and I shall be engaging in a group bloom, which we only get to do once every few years.”

Aluloona showed them a new bud on the tip of her vine. Nectar gushes from the bud, which suddenly bloomed into a flower that had a hungry, carnivorous look to it, mouth opened wide.

“This season is difficult for us. My daughters and I can’t stop our buds from blossoming, nor our nectar from flowing, and bees are attracted to that nectar, covering us in pollen. As a result, I become covered in fruit that I can’t do anything about.”

Aluloona held out another vine. A heavy red fruit similar to an apple hung from it. It would only be more cumbersome once it reached its full size.

“I’m sorry, Aluloona. I’m not really educated in such—”

“Basically, it’s mating season. Making children is a hobby for me. I do it all the time. And my daughters are no different.”

“Ah, ahhh...”

Souen was dumbfounded. Tisalia’s face grew red as she listened in the courtyard. But Glenn was familiar with this phenomenon. Plants flowered as a means of procreation.

Aluloona was always in heat, but it was probably even worse now. When alraune were in bloom, they could absorb pollen from a wide variety of plants—the human equivalent would be having many sexual partners at once. But it wasn’t a state of being that the alraune were proud to show off.

“If you’d like to know more... Alraune biology is specialized for reproduction. Group blooming evolved as a way for alraune to receive a

variety of pollen types and then produce fruit—in other words, pass on their own genes. Naturally, human and monster sperm are the same in this respect.”

Glenn tried to form his face into an appropriate expression. Their reproduction-specialized biology probably made things pretty hard for the alraune, particularly their helplessness to keep themselves from being pollinated by insects. There was little they could do to stop themselves from bearing fruit. It didn't just inconvenience them in their daily lives—bearing fruit also consumed valuable nutrients, and could result in health problems. The alraune's evolutionary focus on their flowers—in other words, their sexual organs—was unusual even among plant monsters.

“The group blooming is quite an ordeal for us. We came to fish for men in the east because we didn't want to cause trouble in Lindworm.”

“So that was the real reason for the family trip, then...”

“We can't be emasculating all the men in Lindworm. When my daughters get serious, they can drain men's libidos dry. Stripping them of their virility makes it hard for them to work.”

Sapphee made a disgusted face, but this was probably a serious issue for the alraune. Aluloona was taking care of her family, in her own way. Glenn wasn't sure sucking the eastern workforce dry was a solution, but it was probably better than draining the men in just one city.

“It truly is fortuitous that you haven't returned to Lindworm, young doctor. You'll be able to help out with the group blooming!”

“Oh, ohh... I mean, I can only help with symptomatic therapy, but if that's enough—”

“Of course. Please get to it before my daughters attack both you and Souen,” Aluloona said, apparently forgetting that she'd once broken into Glenn's bedroom. Sapphee and Saki were staring daggers at her. She continued fanning herself. “The good news is that you'll get tons of nectar and fruit as byproducts. You can use it to make absolutely heavenly sake, which will draw out the Black Widows.”

Glenn nodded. Treating blooming alraune was fairly easy, and certainly within his capabilities, though it would be laborious to treat over thirty of them. But this was a health issue, and he wouldn't turn them down. Besides, if Aluloona and her family didn't need the nectar

and fruit right now, he'd be grateful to take them from her.

Tisalia was brandishing her sword in the courtyard. If Glenn could get her to team up with Sioux, they'd make short work of the Black Widows.

"I'm confused. Can you tell me more about this...mating season?" Saki asked.

"It's an orgy." Aluloona said.

"Oh." Saki looked taken aback by the candor of this answer. "Well...as our guest, I want you to be able to relax. But if you're going to be having orgies, well...that will be a problem."

She seemed distraught. And she still held a polearm.

"No, that's incorrect!" Glenn cut in. "Aluloona's just trying to rile you up."

"What? I didn't say anything wrong."

"It might not be wrong, but it's certainly not correct!"

The phenomenon was unique to alraune, so it was difficult to explain it in a way that was easy to understand. But as a doctor, Glenn had to try.

"Alraune flowers bloom in order to accept pollen. In other words, once they've been pollinated, the blooming ends—making deliberate pollination the best way to bring their libidos under control."

"In other words, an orgy," Aluloona jumped in.

"Aluloona might think of it that way, but there are better terms for it to help other species understand. The only way to treat Alraune group blooming...is to appease the bloomed flowers while also not allowing seed development, therefore circumventing the bearing of fruit." Glenn held up a finger. "It's called self-pollination."

They would need to treat Aluloona and her family right away.

Group blooming was an urgent issue for the alraune, and they had to gather some items for self-pollination...including brushes.

These would be used to collect pollen, which would then be rubbed on their pistils. Most plants sought to receive pollen from the flowers of a different plant. Using pollen from the plant's own flowers—

its own bulb—was called self-pollination.

There were plants for which self-pollination was the norm, but this led to a lack of genetic diversity, as no new genes were being added into the mix. Alraune biology allowed them to reproduce with a variety of other species, incorporating a wide variety of genes, but in exchange, their bodies weren't designed for easy self-pollination. When pollination was attempted using their own pollen, the flower would close, which shut down the blooming process.

Aluloona had used the term “orgy,” but it was actually more like masturbation. At least...that was the closest comparison that would make sense to humans.

Assisting an alraune in self-pollination wasn't difficult, but the proper tools—something like a brush—were required in order to apply the pollen efficiently. According to Saki, brushes weren't common in the village, which didn't have a high literacy rate. Souen could probably get him some brushes, but from a sanitary perspective, new brushes that had never touched ink were ideal. They also needed scissors to prune the unnecessary vines and fruit. Alraune vines were thick and sturdy, so it was possible that garden shears wouldn't be strong enough.

“Maybe Arahnia has something?” Sapphee suggested.

It was likely that Arahnia, a designer, would have brushes and scissors. Glenn started looking for her in the village to ask for her help.

Sure enough, he found her with the arachne child in the corner of the village.

“That's right. If you spin it, the thread gets twisted...now gather that together, ball it up...there you go. You did it.”

“I can't do it like you, Arahnia...”

“That's not true. You're smart, Tsumu, so you'll pick it up quickly. I'll give you this ball as an example, so you can practice at home.”

“Thank you very much.”

It seemed she was teaching the child how to make a ball. Glen could hear Arahnia's gentle laugh. Then the arachne child noticed him, startled, and ran away.

He'd thought at first that the child was wary of him, but everyone in the village knew Glenn was the doctor by now. Maybe she was just shy?

“Oh, Doc,” Arahnia said, flipping her hair. “I was playing with Tsumu, trying to hide from you.”

“Tsumu? Is that the arachne child that just ran off?”

“Yes. Her name is Tsumugi. She’s an orphan Weaver, so Saki took her in but...she doesn’t know how to use her thread, so I was teaching her.”

“I see—you like kids, huh, Arahnia?”

“Not really.”

Arahnia’s answer was curt. However, Glenn was well aware of the fact that this arachne’s words didn’t always reflect the truth in her heart. The fact was that she was still staring in the direction Tsumugi had run off in.

“But we generally learn how to spin thread from our parents, so if you don’t have any parents, someone has to teach you.”

“See how kind you are?”

“Ugh. Don’t start praisin’ me, Doc. Makes me want to tickle you so much I can hardly bear it.” Arahnia contorted her body, as if it was actually painful to hear her own praises. “Well, it’s not like I learned from my parents either.”

“You didn’t?”

“My ma wasn’t interested in child-rearin’. It was Claudette, owner of Loose Silk Sewing, who taught me my arachne skills. She’s also my mentor as a designer.”

“I see...”

Arahnia really was a hard worker. Perhaps it was because she felt a sense of gratitude toward Loose Silk Sewing and Claudette.

“By the way, I heard Aluloona has come? And with her daughters. I heard they were on a family trip, but I didn’t expect to see them here.”

“Y-yes.”

“And they’re going to make sake from the nectar?”

Apparently, Arahnia somehow already knew everything. “Yes. And as payment for their treatment... Aluloona said she will give us nectar and fruit.”

“I see. I *am* interested in that sake...” Arahnia shook her head.

“And then I heard you’re going to lure out the Black Widows? So you’re collecting rare items. My ma, she likes rare sake and things from the monster realm.”

“Yeah so—”

“But,” Arahnia cut him off. “When Ma wanted something, she never cared about how she got it. Doc, you be careful. I couldn’t live with myself if something happened to you because of the Black Widows.”

“Is there any way you can talk to your mother? Maybe if you’re there, then—”

“Impossible.” Arahnia threw her four arms up in disgust. “She’s not the type that would listen just ’cause I’m her daughter. Also, I’m pretty sure the Black Widows is just a residual group. I think the principal offender, my ma, is gone. If she were still around, she’d do things more quietly and make sure the organization name didn’t get out.”

“So that’s how she worked...”

“Yeah. She never let her activities go public. I’m sure she’s beat it by now. The Black Widows are probably men who were deceived by Ma, and they’re acting like this because they want her to come back.”

Glenn felt that he could trust Arahnia’s instincts on this—after all, she was actually related to the culprit. However, there was a sense of loneliness in her expression. Noticing that, he asked, “Do you...miss your mother?”

“Ma? Yeah, well,” Arahnia was balling up thread with her four arms, as if to keep her hands busy. She was probably making the same sort of ball that she just gave to Tsumugi. “I did try to see her once. I told you about how I came to the east. Remember, I said I came to the human realm as part of my designer training...”

“Oh, yes, I remember.”

“That was true—it was for my designer work—but actually...I had another objective. I heard a rumor that Ma was somewhere in the east.” As she spoke, the thread grew more and more rounded, forming a neat ball. “So I came to the human realm to search for Ma...but in the end, I never heard a single rumor while I was traveling.”

“You did that because you wanted to see her?”

“Yes.”

The ball was finally complete.

Arahnia held the ball she made high over her head.

“She just left me to go do as she pleased...”

She bit her lip.

“I wanted to tell the wench to never come near me again—to completely cut her off forever!” she said, throwing the ball.

It flew far and fell to the ground, then bounced a few times and came rolling back. When Glenn looked closely, he saw that Arahnia was holding a thread still attached to the ball.

“In the end, I never found Ma. If I don’t see her, I can’t tell her that I never want to see her again. I’m sure she established the Black Widows in secret in the east back then, and got up to all kinds of evil stuff.”

“I see...”

“So now she’s hiding out somewhere, and it’s the people she left behind who’re committing these acts.”

Arahnia pulled on her thread and brought the ball back to her.

“I don’t want you to do anything dangerous, Doc. I think it has to be me that does something about the Black Widows, and if possible, I want to confront my ma...but I don’t want to see you get hurt in the process,” Arahnia said, staring down at her ball. She took Glenn’s hand. “There’s undoubtedly some kind of connection between me and the Black Widows, Doc. I know you want your father’s blessing, but please, please, don’t do something crazy for my sake.”

He understood Arahnia’s urgency. She wasn’t afraid of not being able to marry Glenn—she was afraid of Glenn getting hurt. And it was true enough that confronting a group of criminals would be dangerous.

“I’ve said it a lot, but I’m fine being a convenience for you Doc. I’m happy as a mistress.”

“Arahnia...”

So that was it, then. Glenn finally realized this was Arahnia’s way of protecting her heart. As the daughter of a thief, there was always the chance that she might bring trouble to Glenn’s door someday. If they were in love when that happened, then he would be hurt that much

more.

That was why she said she was fine being a mistress. She didn't want the risks that came with getting close to someone.

"I'm not going to marry anyone who'd be fine just being a mistress," Glenn resolved.

"Yeah." Arahnia, staring off into the distance, gave a flat response. "That's what I like about you, Doc. But really...you could stand to be harsher with me."

"Er..."

She really did have a low opinion of herself. Glenn didn't know what to say to appease her.

They had brushes and scissors.

The brushes were brand-new. The scissors were large, used for cutting thick fabric. All the tools belonged to Arahnia, who wasn't on board with the plan to lure out the Black Widows, but who still loaned them the tools they needed in a show of good faith.

"Doctor, Doctor?"

"Please hurry up and treat me."

"The fruit is heavy. So heavy."

"My body aches all over and I can't stand it."

"My nectar is overflowing everywhere and I can't stop it."

"I found a human male prostitute to service me, but it just wasn't enough."

Aluloona's daughters, gathered in a room in one of the cottages in the village, each had their own complaints. Frankly, Glenn couldn't tell them apart by their faces, and their heads were hidden by leaves, but the general shape of their faces looked exactly like Aluloona. Aluloona, insatiable sex-lover that she was, had probably birthed children all over the place—and it was just her style, rich as she was, to make sure that each of them was raised with class.

The main difference between the daughters was the color of the

flowers blooming on their vines. The colorful sea of blooms made the room look like a field of flowers. It reminded Glenn of the Radon District back in Lindworm.

The flowers were blooming vibrantly.

“Hmmm...”

Glenn groaned to himself as he approached the group.

While he'd been involved in milking Aluloona's nectar in the past, he'd been in no state to perform an examination at the time, since he'd been doped with pollen that robbed you of your reason. He'd now covered his mouth with a cloth as a guard against that pollen. He was now in a closed room with many alraune, after all—a normal man would be completely overcome and become their prey. He needed protection.

“Sorry. I have countless daughters, but these are the ones who were born as alraune and share my genes. I just don't know how they grew up to be so lewd.”

“It's your fault, Mother!”

“You're just randomly dropping kids all the time.”

“You don't care about anything as long as you can have sex!”

“Don't talk to our mother like that! She's the reason we got to come on this trip.”

There was a type of bamboo called Clumping Bamboo, which looked like a number of individual plants above ground. Underground, however, their roots were all connected. Even when separated, they had the same genes and all bloomed together once every few decades. Once the flowers had served their purpose, the entire thicket would wilt and die.

Alraune were similar in that respect. The girls born of Aluloona had the same blooming period, and though they didn't wilt after blooming, they actively sought pollination and copulation during mating season. If anything, it was the men they were after who would wilt.

The alraune have a legend that they are born from the semen of criminals who died by hanging. They do have powerful libidos, so the myth might originate in the fact that they reproduce by squeezing the fluids from a man.

But it was treatable. That was what the doctor was for—and Sapphee, also prepared with brushes.

“Glenn could just take care of us himself.”

“No, I can’t,” Glenn answered without hesitation. It would kill him, and not just figuratively. They would literally drain all the fluid out of his body and he would die. “Aluloona, we’re ready. Can we begin?”

“Sure, go for it.”

“Now, then,” Glenn said, picking up a brand-new brush. He called out to the alraune closest to him. “I will begin the treatment. Let’s start with you.”

“Aggh, aggh, thank you!”

Her bulb was small, so she was probably still quite young. The sweet nectar smell drifted from her bright yellow flowers.

“Let’s begin.” Glenn held the tip of the brush and gently touched it to the anther and stamen of one yellow flower.

“Ahh, oh, mmm.”

The alraune squirmed. But Glenn didn’t stop. He gently rubbed the edges of the flower, getting pollen on the tip of the brush.

“Mmm, arggh!”

Next, he removed the brush and examined it to make sure that there was pollen on it.

“O-ohh... Doctor, please be gentler.”

“I’m sorry. The pollen is packed in, so let me finish.”

“Ahhh, mmm!”

Glenn stuck the brush with the pollen on it back in the same flower. Self-pollination wasn’t easy. He had to be thorough.

“Ahhh, th-that’s so...so deep...”

“I’m sorry, I have to go a bit deeper.”

“Arrgh, I-I can’t hold it! I can’t hold it!”

Nectar began to ooze from the flower. Nectar was generally used to attract bees and promote pollination, but the kind that flowed from this flower looked like it could be spread directly on a slice of bread and

eaten. Each flower produced several times the normal amount of nectar during group blooms.

“Collect.”

“Nectar.”

“Have a lick?”

The fairies who were waiting under the flower collected the nectar in a jar.

“Just a little,” Glenn responded. This nectar would be used later for making sake.

“Ahh, ahh. Oh, ohh...”

“That’s one down,” he said after making sure the pistil was covered in pollen. The alraune was heaving. This was how the procedure went, but he was still on the first alraune...and each alraune had multiple flowers. He needed to work quickly.

“Dr. Glenn, you’re taking too long,” Sapphee said as she worked with her brush. There were already two nectar-sticky alraune around her who’d passed out from pleasure, their self-pollination complete. The fairies were wiping up the nectar that had splashed on the floor.

“Argggh. Oh, girlll. Ah, y-you’re so good... Ah... N-no, no, no. Argggh!”

Another alraune was squirming with pleasure as nectar dribbled from her mouth. Her vines were intertwined with Sapphee’s tail.

“If you don’t hurry, you’ll be here all night,” Sapphee said to Glenn, completely ignoring the flirtatious voices of the alraune.

“R-right, sorry.”

Sapphee grew herbs as ingredients for her medicines and she was used to cultivating plants. She was probably much better at treating plant monsters than Glenn, and she handled the pollen-laden brush much quicker as she worked to self-pollinate the alraune.

Pollination was unmistakably an act of sexual reproduction for alraune. Their groans of pleasure indicated how sexually satisfying this was for them, but for other species, pollination was simply a fact of life. Plants that bore too much fruit might not provide enough nutrients, so humans practicing agriculture often had to decide which ones to selectively pollinate, sometimes even conducting artificial pollination or

using self-pollination to create certain flavors. Sapphee had probably done much the same when she learned to work with plants.

“Ahh, ahhh, aahhh. Doctor... More, more pollination...” the young alraune said in a sweet voice, moving closer to Glenn.

She was right in the middle of a sexual act...probably. But from Glenn’s perspective, all he was doing was moving a brush in and out of a flower. This wasn’t erotic to him. *It’s just a medical procedure.*

He remained calm and continued his task, grabbing a vine and sticking the brush into another flower. He collected pollen on the brush and applied it to the pistil. It was the same for each flower.

“Ahhhhmmm! N-not there... Don’t grab me there...”

“I’m sorry, I’ll be gentle,” Glenn said, holding a flower by one petal and thrusting the brush deep within.

“D-Doctor, that’s so good...”

“Ahhh, I can’t stand it. Hurry, do me...”

“Hey, wait your turn!”

“I’ll knock you over.”

“I’m happy with the lamia lady. Her technique is so good...”

The way they were all talking, you’d think they were in a brothel.

“Calm down, everyone. It feels even better if you have to wait for it. Be patient.”

“Yes ma’am!” the girls answered in unison.

Actually, a brothel was a place of business. This was more promiscuous. Glenn, who couldn’t see it as any more than a pollination procedure, found it hard to understand.

While he was thinking about that, he moved on to the especially large flower on this alraune’s head.

“Ah, ah, ah, ah. Mmm argghh. N-no, I’m going to pollinate, nooo...”

“Well, that’s the point.”

Glenn moved the brush in small, smooth movements.

“Agh, Ahh, Ahhh, mmm!” Her vine was thumping on the ground, showing her pleasure. He didn’t really get it—all he was doing was

moving the brush.

“Ahh, Ahhh... Th-thank you so mmmuch...”

“Yes, you did a good job.”

The exhausted alraune collapsed on the floor. Apparently, the act was so intense that it consumed all of their energy.

“Now...next”

“Me!”

“No, me!”

“Hey, don’t cut in front of me.”

“I can’t wait...”

“We will take care of everyone in turn.”

There were still so many left. Glenn didn’t know if it was because the girls were wanting—anticipating—his skills, but every one of them had nectar oozing out of their flowers. The fairies were scrambling to collect it.

“Dr. Glenn, you need to move faster or you won’t finish,” Sapphee reminded him, cool as a cucumber. She was already in the process of making her seventh alraune faint.

“R-right, I’ll get to it.”

“Please!” the girls all said together.

Surrounded by countless girls, Glenn made his decision.

Collect pollen.

“Ahhh, mmm.”

Apply pollen to pistil.

“Mmmm, deeper, there...”

Cut off ripened fruit with scissors.

“Don’t hold me there...ahhh, I’m so embarrassed...”

Glenn also didn’t understand why it would be embarrassing to harvest ripened fruit, but it seemed that’s how it felt to the alraune. Either way, they needed the fruit to make wine, so he didn’t hesitate to harvest it and then pass it along to the fairies.

Alraune clearly thought differently than animals. Each of the girls

was soaked from head to toe in her own nectar and collapsed on the floor in the small room, panting. To them, it probably did feel like an orgy, but Glenn couldn't see it.

Man, I'm tired...

It was hard to concentrate on treatment while surrounded by erotic, coquettish voices.

But then—

“Dr. Glenn, I'm finished over here.”

“Argh, ohh, ahhh...”

The alraune whom Sapphee was taking care of was passed out on the floor, nectar spread around her. Or maybe it would be more accurate to say that her bulb root was no longer able to hold her up and she toppled over.

Sapphee gently supported the girl with her tail and wiped the nectar from her cheeks.

“I'll be done in just a minute.”

“Aggh, oh, Doctorrr...it's like you're just at work ...you're so cold...”

“Actually, this is work for me.”

“Ahhh, mmmm, that's so cold...I love...”

The last alraune Glenn was working on also crumpled to the ground.

The ones who'd been examined first were fast asleep. Others, their sexual appetites still unsatisfied, were kissing each other. There was no risk of infectious disease, so they were free to do such things at their own will. Plant monsters had no concept of incest.

The sight only drove home the fact that human values and ethics did not apply here.

“Good job, Doctor,” Sapphee said, wiping his nectar-covered hands.

“Oh, yeah...”

The brush he was using was soaked in sticky nectar. He had borrowed it from Arahnia, but now he wasn't sure if just washing it would be enough before returning it.

“So that’s it, then?” Aluloona asked, fluttering her fan. She had been watching the ordeal. “Sorry to ask you to do this for my daughters.”

“No, it’s work...but this is quite a scene, isn’t it?”

“Well...it’s normal for us.”

All Glenn could do was smile.

“...By the way.” Aluloona extended her vine. At the end of it bloomed a bright red flower. The bud popped open and nectar began to ooze forth. The smell was so strong and so sweet that it even permeated the cloth Glenn was using to cover his nose, and he started to feel dizzy.

“Will one of you please pollinate me?”

“Oh...right.”

“Hehe. I’m not like my daughters. If you don’t keep your wits about you, I’ll end up devouring you. I mean, that’s fine with me, but...” Aluloona licked her lips.

Glenn hadn’t examined her since her nectar treatment, and that had just been an excuse for her to attack Glenn. This time was probably different. Aluloona was dripping with nectar that had accumulated inside her. The fairies were scrambling to collect it, but their little jars weren’t nearly enough to do the job.

Just as he was girding his loins to begin treating her, he felt a tail tap on his shoulder. It was Sapphee.

“Dr. Glenn, take this.”

“Hmm?”

“It’s a stimulant that I made into a pill. If you take it, then you will be able to withstand Aluloona’s seduction for a time.”

“Th-thanks,” Glenn removed the wrapping and swallowed the pill.

A nauseating bitterness spread through his mouth, but in return, the sweet smell Aluloona was emitting seemed to fade. He decided that it was enough to let him work.

“Now, then...please excuse me.”

“Oh, please proceed.”

Glenn picked up the brush and touched it to Aluloona’s flower.

“Hmm, mmm,” Aluloona started to groan.

She was probably reacting like this because flowers had a sense of touch. On the other hand, she showed no signs of pain when he pruned her fruit with scissors. He wondered what her nervous system was like?

“Aluloona, you have so many flowers that I’m going to help too,” Sapphee told her.

“Mmm! Hehe... Sapphee too? Go ahead. I can take more than one at a time. Agggha?!”

“Please don’t look at my husband like that, Miss Aluloona,” Sapphee said, eyes sharp.

She skillfully used her brush to pollinate Aluloona. Her flowers, overflowing with nectar, moved convulsively in a mysterious way, as if the petals were living beings and the brush were an intruder. To counteract that movement, Sapphee thrust the brush harder, so it would reach the pistils in the back.

“Ahh, mmm. S-so aggressive. Is that how badly you want sake? Aggh, mmm.”

“Please don’t say anything unnecessary,” Sapphee said.

Glenn tilted his head.

He knew that Sapphee liked alcohol. There was nothing strange about her wanting alraune sake...but why had Aluloona made a point of commenting on it?

“Hey, now, young doctor, why are you stopping?”

“Oh, sorry. Now then...”

The flowers popped open and shut again, as if trying to seduce Glenn. He thrust his brush in to gather the pollen. It was only natural at her age, but Aluloona’s vines were thick and her flowers were large.

It was easy to collect the pollen but—

“Hmmm...?”

Her pistils were well hidden, probably because the flowers were so big. Glenn peered in to examine the flower he was working on. The petals fluttered as if to entice him, and the fragrance of the nectar oozing from its center was so strong, it filled his nostrils. If he hadn’t taken Sapphee’s pill, he probably would be incapacitated by now.

“Excuse me, I need to get in the back.”

“Mmm, ahhh.”

Aluloona gasped.

Glenn found himself with the unprofessional thought that he had got pretty used to her charming voice. He plunged the brush deep.

“Mmm, ahhh!”

Her nectar erupted like a fountain. Glenn’s white coat was soaking wet, but he said nothing.

“E-er...you’re so good, it just all came out. I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine...”

Glenn trailed off. He knew that she had more nectar than the others, but this much? Group blooms might be a significant event for the alraune, but carrying around this volume of nectar must impede her daily life. It had to be her long lifespan that had made her vines develop this much and her flowers get this big.

He wiped the nectar off his face and continued with his work.

“Mmm. Whooa! Y-you two are quite good. I need more, more—”

“We aren’t doing this to pleasure you, Aluloona.”

“So heartless. What’s wrong with enjoying this together—argggg?!”

“Keep in mind that it’s only the alraune who enjoy this,” Sapphee said sternly.

She had already finished one round of pollination. She was much faster than Glenn. Next, she moved around to the back of Aluloona to reach her brush to the flowers on her head.

“Hmmm... You don’t have to do my head.”

“Oh, is that your weak point?” Sapphee giggled. Perhaps because she was operating under the pretext of medical treatment, she was being more aggressive than usual. “Doctor, please help me. Let’s take care of the biggest flower now.”

“Oh, okay.”

There was an especially large, deep red flower blooming on the side of Aluloona’s head. Glenn pulled his brush from the flower he was finishing with a slurping sound. Aluloona was quivering.

“Oh, that. B-both of you together... Mmmm, waaa...”

“This is the biggest, so you’ll feel a lot better if we pollinate it.”

“N-no. I want to get lots more eastern men! Ohhh.”

As Aluloona tried to crack a joke, Sapphee jabbed her brush in the flower, causing the nectar to overflow. “Get over here, Dr. Glenn.”

“Her vines are so...ugh.”

Glenn’s feet were getting tangled up in Aluloona’s desperate attempt to resist. However, Aluloona was succumbing to the pleasure, no longer putting up much of a fight. He did his best to step around the vines and approached her head.

“Ohh, young doctor...this is your chance to enjoy... Mmm aggh.”

“I see you’re not totally incapacitated, then,”

Glenn was getting tired of Aluloona’s endless debauchery. She really was a bottomless pit of lust.

He jammed his brush into Aluloona’s flower. He and Sapphee were now both moving their brushes back and forth in Aluloona’s temporal region. They just needed to pollinate her pistils, but the bigger the flower, the harder it was to find them. The gushing nectar was another obstacle in their way.

“Mmmm. I can’t take two in the same hole...”

“Oh, there it is. In the back.”

“Ohhh, not there. Mmmm, aaagh.”

“Okay, okay. Just a little more...” Glenn wiggled the brush more to reach the back.

“Mmmm! Ahhh...! Mmmm. Yaaah... Ahhh... Ahhh...”

He thrust harder.

It seemed Aluloona had reached the peak of pleasure. Her body was convulsing, her countless vines sprawled in all directions, as if she had run out of energy.

“Whooo...”

Glenn pulled out his brush and wiped the sweat from his brow.

“This should be good for now.”

“Yes. I think we’re just about done,” said Sapphee, the MVP of this ordeal. She really was much better than him at treating plant monsters.

Perhaps he should have studied botany too.

“Eh-er... You were both amazing. Young doctor, are you sure you don’t want to be my hundredth lover...?” Aluloona asked as she hovered on the brink of collapse.

“I don’t think so,” Sapphee said, sticking her brush back in the flower before Glenn could answer.

“Mmm...!” Aluloona let out a strange moan and then fainted.



Several days had passed since Aluloona's treatment, and she'd come to visit the cottage that Glenn was using as his clinic.

"Here, as a thanks for the trouble I've caused." She held out something toward Glenn with a grin on her face. It was a gourd-shaped container that he assumed contained sake. Sapphee hurried to take it with her tail.

"It's done already?"

"No, it takes time to ferment the fruit. I've left that to the chief at the sake brewery. This is just a simple mixture of eastern sake and nectar...but I think it's pretty good."

Brewing sake took time. Apparently, the village had the equipment it needed to make everything, but they wouldn't be able to churn out a whole new batch of sake in just a few days. Once they did, however, sake made from flower monsters would be extremely sought-after in the east.

"How are your daughters doing?"

"Mmm. It looks like their libidos have settled down a bit. They're able to go sailing and sightseeing now."

"Are they okay alone? As a group of girls, I mean? People in the east tend to stare at monsters," Glenn asked, and Aluloona smiled back.

"My lovers—I mean our male attendants—are accompanying them, so I doubt there'll be any trouble. We stopped by a number of places on the way here and nothing strange happened."

"Ahhh..."

"Also, we may be plant monsters...but that means we're stronger than humans. If someone tried to assault them, they'd probably just counterattack and throttle them."

Glenn let out a sigh. A human definitely couldn't take on a monster one-on-one.

"I've also told them to keep an ear out for information about the Black Widows. If I get anything useful, I'll let you know."

"Thank you very much." Glenn bowed to her.

They would be lucky to find anything that might help them understand the still-mysterious group, but—

“Dr. Glenn, would you like to taste?” Sapphee asked, already pouring the sake. A floral fragrance filled the air. It wasn’t the choking fragrance that Aluloona emitted, but more subtly sweet.

“Uh, but I’m working right now...”

“Just a little will be fine. Here.” She poured a splash into typical eastern sake glasses.

An alraune flower petal floated on the sake’s surface. He wondered where it came from.

“It’s cut with nectar, so it tastes like juice. Try gulping it down.” Sapphee drank hers down as if it were water.

“Ah, okay, then...” Glenn picked up a glass and took a tiny sip.

A moist sweetness spread through his mouth, followed by the peculiar sake warmth. The alcohol content was *definitely* strong enough for him. He coughed. It was also far too sweet.

“Hahaha, was it a bit too strong for the young lad?”

“Sorry... I don’t usually consume a lot of...alcohol. Sapphee, you can have the rest of mine,” Glenn held out his glass, aware that he couldn’t return what was left to the gourd. Sapphee used her tail to snatch up the glass, not wasting any time.

“Mmmm...whew. It’s sweet and delicious. This could sell.”

“Well, if you think so, it must be true,” Glenn agreed.

He had no idea about the value of sake. Trade was Souen’s forte. Even though it was illegal, harpy eggs were selling in the east, so there had to be a market for products originating from monsters.

“Dr. Glenn, is there something you’d like to say?” Sapphee was staring straight at Glenn’s face with an expression somewhere between sulking and blushing.

“Huh? No, nothing.”

“I’m asking what you’re thinking when you look at me,” Sapphee asked him.

Glenn shook his head. He didn’t really understand the question. Only Aluloona was giggling. “It looks like it didn’t work,

Sapphee.”

“That doesn’t make sense. The ingredients came from alraune, so it has to work.”

“It depends on the person,” Aluloona shrugged.

Glenn sat there confused, not knowing what they were talking about.

Aluloona hid her face with her fan. “Actually, Souen plans to sell this sake as a love potion.”

“Er?!”

“It’s infused with alraune nectar, so it should have aphrodisiac effects—but looking at you now, maybe not.” Aluloona grinned. “Too bad, huh, Sapphee? You were probably planning all kinds of things for him to do to you, now that you’re finally out from under Cthulhy’s eyes, hehe. I actually want to join you.”

“I-I had no intention of any such thing! And you would never be allowed to join!” Sapphee yelled.

Glenn looked nervously at the sake cup in his hand. As much as he had drunk so far, he wasn’t feeling any aphrodisiac effects. But thinking back to the flowers this sake came from—to the seductive, horny Aluloona and her daughters—that might be a good advertising ploy. Their pollen had titillating effects, at the very least. Glenn had experienced that for himself.

“I have no intention of doing any such thing. No intention at all. Doctor, please don’t misunderstand.”

“Y-yeah, it’s fine.”

“But Aluloona, please give me some more sake. I bet if it were fermented and made into liquor, it would be more potent!”

She claimed to not be thinking of such things, but here she was, thinking of ways to make it work... Perhaps this was why she’d been so proactive about treating Aluloona’s family.

“Tee hee hee. Take as much as you like. Ah, seriously, you two are engaged. You should be able to sack him anytime.”

“Shut up! I’m not the same as you, Aluloona! You have to set the mood...not that it always works.”

“Just knock him over,”

“I said no!” Sapphee screamed out. Aluloona giggled.

Glenn put his hand to his mouth, inside which a sweet fragrance still lingered. If lovers both drank this sake together, maybe it *would* engender those kinds of feelings.

“Aluloona, please give me some pollen. The pollen would work!”

“It’s all gone, thanks to your hard work. We’re almost out of nectar too.”

“Wh-what did you say...?!”

Sapphee was frantic. She must really have had high expectations for the sake.

Even if this sake *did* work like a love potion, there was no way it would work on Glenn. That was because...

I’m already in love with Sapphee, after all.

Glenn chuckled to himself as his beloved lamia continued biting Aluloona’s head off, oblivious to what he was thinking. He might need to make an effort to create the mood that she was seeking.

Case 03: The Nostalgic Flesh Golem

THEY HAD BEEN STAYING in Souen's village for three weeks now. Glenn was still seeing patients, but the most urgent cases had all been dealt with.

The sake infused with alraune fruit and flowers was apparently selling well, due to its rarity. It might prove to be a long-lasting industry. However, they'd made no real progress on Souen's plan to do something about the Black Widows. Glenn knew that no matter how much he begged, without a plan, there was no way his hard-headed father would change his mind.

He was receiving regular letters from Lindworm, and writing back, in turn, to inform Cthulhy of their situation. And the person delivering those letters was—

“Wheee!”

—The harpy Illy, who'd just stopped by the clinic for some water.

Ground delivery took several days to travel between the human and monster realms, but a flying creature could make a round trip in a single day. Although Illy's body was built to fly long distances, a round trip between the two realms was still apparently exhausting. Instead of sweating, she was taking deep breaths. This filled her internal air sac, an organ that helped her fly and also cooled her body temperature.

“You won't be able to fly if you drink too much,” Glenn warned her.

“I know. Just a little,” Illy said, sipping just enough water to wet her throat.

It seemed she had no interest whatsoever in the human realm and planned to return directly to Lindworm. Considering that harpy eggs had been sold in the human realm in the past, it was perfectly understandable that she had no love for the east.

“That's a rough trip. All the way here and back to Lindworm,” Sapphee commented. Illy spread her wings and laughed.

“It's fine! I love flying, and I get a bonus for long-distance

deliveries. So here is today's delivery," she said, presenting Glenn with letters she took from her bag.

"Thank you. Let's see, now. This is from Dr. Cthulhy...and this is from the president of Loose Silk Sewing? That's for Arahnia...and ummm...this is from Skadi..."

"Hee hee hee," Illy was laughing for some reason.

"Illy? What's so funny?"

"Oh! Nothing! I've got to get going now. I'll be back!"

"Fly safely."

"I'll be fine!"

In human terms, long-distance flight was like running a marathon—no, it was far more rigorous than a marathon. But perhaps, since Illy loved flying so much, it wasn't as difficult for her.

She'd barely made it out of Glenn's cottage when she started flapping her wings and took to the sky.

"What was that all about?"

"Doctor," Sapphee called out to him. She had already opened and was reading the letter from Skadi. "It's from the Draconess. It says she's worried about us lengthening our stay here, so she's sending someone."

"Huh? Why is Skadi saying that?"

"Well... Oh, it seems she's concerned about the Black Widows," Sapphee told him as she scanned the letter.

She knew about the Black Widows, huh? The dragon might look like a mere child, but she was a very skilled politician.

"She said she's sending someone who is well acquainted with the east."

"Who could that be?" Glenn tilted his head in thought.

About half the residents of Lindworm were human, but the majority of those were western in origin, being from places close to the monster realm in the first place. The further away from the capital city of Heian you went, the less humans tended to be prejudiced against monsters. Classic eastern values would be impossible to maintain in Lindworm.

But were there any humans who were close to both Skadi and

Glenn? There were a few councilmembers Skadi might trust, but it wouldn't make sense for her to send someone whom Glenn didn't know.

"Hey, Glenn," Souen said, entering the room and interrupting Glenn's thoughts. "You have a visitor."

"A visitor? Oh, maybe it's the person Skadi sent."

"It seems that way. Go and greet them. They're by the river."

"The river?"

Glenn and Sapphee looked at each other, perplexed.

"Hey, Doc! Over here!"

There was a small river on the edge of Souen's village, an important source of fresh water that also irrigated the fields. It fed out into the ocean, so it really was a river.

And there was someone poking their head out of the water.

"Lulala?!"

"Hehe. I missed you! The human realm is really far," said Lulala, the water canal diva. She cracked her neck and put her hands on the riverbank, lifting herself so that her torso was out of the water.

"Are you the one Skadi sent on her errand, Lulala?"

"Ahaha, no! I just tagged along. I wanted to see Dr. Glenn and Sapphee so badly," Lulala said, smiling brightly.

But there were tears in her eyes. Glenn thought for a moment that she was moved by seeing him, but that wasn't it. Her eyes were tearing up to discharge the salt content of the seawater she'd just swallowed. The tears were proof that she'd swum all the way to this island.

"Did you cross the ocean, Lulala?"

Lulala laughed, waving her hand and splashing it in the water. "No, no. I only swam here from, what is it called, Heian? It was easier to just swim that distance. I relaxed on a boat all the way to Heian."

"Oh, but you were born in the ocean, right?"

"That's right. The person I came with should be here any moment

—oh, there she is.”

They had a good view of Souen’s village from where they stood, which let them spy the dark figure climbing the mountain road. Her black hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and her body was patchworked together. It was Skadi’s bodyguard, Kunai Zenow.

“Sorry I’m late—there was no way I could move faster than a mermaid who can swim upstream in a river.”

“Kunai. Can it be that Skadi sent—”

“Me,” Kunai said, letting out a deep sigh. She was undead and wouldn’t tire from exhaustion, so she’d probably just let that breath out to serve as punctuation. She carried a knapsack on her back. So the two of them had come from Lindworm together?

“Didn’t you hear from Illy that we were coming?”

“I think she knew, but she tricked us—”

“Hmm... She does like practical jokes,” Kunai said, putting down her bag and rotating her shoulder.

Glenn remembered then that Kunai was originally from the east. She was a flesh golem that had been made by patching together parts of the dead bodies of humans. So that was what Skadi had meant by “someone well acquainted with the east.”

“Don’t worry, we came to help you,” Lulala said.

“I don’t have very many good memories in the east, but I won’t disobey the Draconess’ orders. I’ll do whatever I can,” Kunai explained. She harbored a hatred for the eastern doctor who created her, but her loyalty to the Draconess was stronger than that hatred.

“Just walking through the town was terrible! Everyone stopped and stared at me, and they were whispering things!”

“I’m sorry... I’ve heard there used to be mermaids here long ago, but now nearly all of them have moved to the west.”

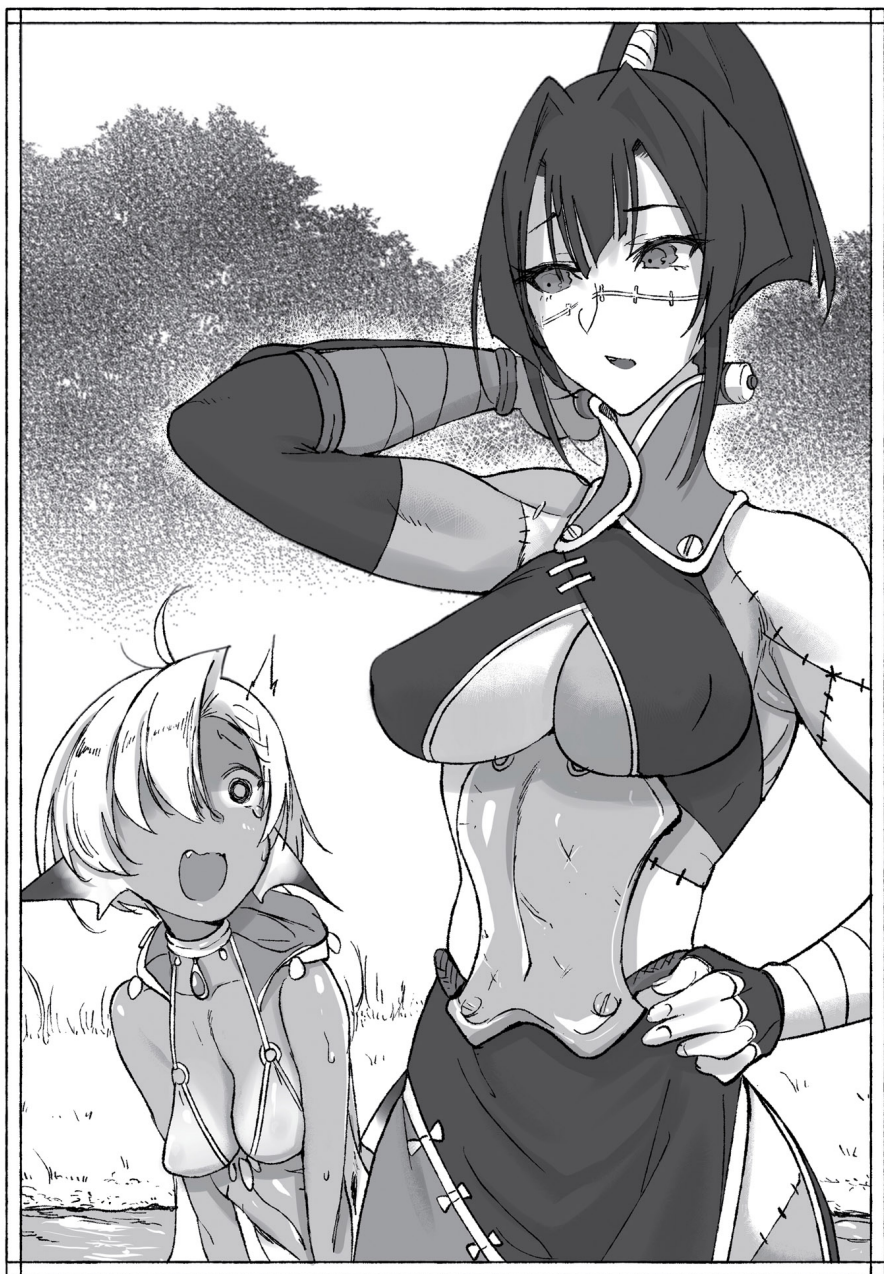
“Don’t worry about it,” Kunai sighed. “People were always saying stuff to me, like ‘Prepare the crematorium’ or ‘Call a priest’ or ‘You ate a mermaid!’ Ever since I came here with Lulala, the whispering’s just gotten worse”

“What?! Why would someone eat a mermaid? That’s terrifying!” Lulala was shaking, the tears she shed to discharge salt content

amplified by her fear.

“Ohh...around here, they say eating mermaid flesh grants you immortality.”

“It’s a baseless myth, but there are many who would think of it if they saw an undead and mermaid out together. Don’t worry, Lulala. No one is going to eat you.”



“Of course not! Heh... I’ve really come to an awful place...”

Lulala was clearly frightened. The story of a nun who achieved immortality by eating a mermaid was famous in the east, but of course, it wasn’t a pleasant story for a mermaid to hear.

“It’s been a long time, Immortal Guard.”

Souen showed up, giving Kunai a bow. Glenn remembered that Skadi had come to the east on business not too long ago. His brother had probably met Kunai on that trip.

“I’m sorry for showing up suddenly, Mr. Souen. As you can see, I’m a corpse. I can sleep in the stables.”

“I could never do that to someone here on orders from the Draconess... I will prepare a suitable room for you. I believe I met this mermaid when I was in Lindworm before, too.”

Lulala didn’t look at all like the kind of person who’d be working for Skadi. Souen cocked his head to one side, as if connecting her to the diva he’d seen in the central courtyard. He’d visited Lindworm several times, so it made sense that he would have seen Lulala before.

In fact... for a while there, Souen had even accused her of being responsible for poisoning the canals. Glenn realized that if they didn’t properly introduce him, some misunderstandings might arise.

“N-nice to meet you,” Lulala started, straightening her posture in the water.

“You’re very pretty, mermaid. I am Souen, Glenn’s older brother.”

“I-I’m Lulala Heine! Dr. Glenn’s—future wife!”

“Huh?!” Glenn burst out.

Although she had remained quiet until then, Sapphee’s tail stood up on end at this declaration. Glenn had never seen that happen before.

“Oh...ummm, did you say wife, young lady?”

“Yes! I am Dr. Glenn’s future wife! At least...I want to be.”

“I’m...not sure I understand what my dumb brother is thinking, to have relations with an underage girl when he already has three fiancées.” Souen looked at Glenn, wincing. To him, who only had eyes for Saki, Glenn probably looked like a philanderer to him. In truth, of course, Glenn had no such intentions regarding Lulala.

Sapphee was flustered.

“L-Lulala? L-Let’s talk for a few minutes. Okay? Because as the first wife, no one has mentioned this to me at all!”

“Hehe! I thought if I told you now, it would surprise you...”

“You’re right, I am very surprised right now!” Glenn said, completely dumbfounded.

He recalled Lulala once telling him that she wanted him to wait until she was old enough to marry. But to bring that up when introducing herself to his brother...

“Heh heh, you seem as busy as ever, eh, Dr. Glenn?”

“P-please don’t tease me...” Glenn didn’t know how to react.

Kunai, unable to hold back her laughter, patted Glenn on the shoulder in appreciation.

“Glenn, you... You haven’t even received Father’s permission to marry all your fiancées.” Souen had his head in his hands as he lectured Glenn. “And now a mermaid? How am I supposed to help you convince Father of that?”

“I’m telling you it’s a misunderstanding. Lulala is just a patient! She’s not even old enough to be married.”

“When you say it like *that*, it sounds like you intend to marry her eventually and just don’t want to admit it right now.”

They’d ushered Kunai into the estate and were back to discussing Lulala’s bombshell of an announcement. Lulala herself was staying with two of the villagers, a mermaid/merman couple who owned a boathouse.

“I’ll take care of Lulala later,” Sapphee said, putting on her First Wife face.

“I think she’s just very determined. We may be back in a few years to speak to Father again,” Glenn said.

“How many wives do you plan on taking?” Souen, stuck on the concept of monogamy, let out a big sigh.

It was a thorny issue for Glenn too, but since polygamy was acceptable in Lindworm, he couldn't just reject the determined Lulala right off the bat. His brother didn't understand the position he was in.

"Three wives is no different than four wives. I would like to speak to you about why I'm here now," Kunai cut in.

"Three and four are *very* different, Kunai. Besides, he doesn't even have permission to marry Arahnia right now. It's complicated," Sapphee explained.

"I've heard. The Black Widows, right? The Draconess is heartbroken to hear the news," Kunai nodded. She sat cross-legged with her legs wide open. It wasn't a common way of sitting in the west, but she was pulling it off just fine. "The Black Widows look for rare items. I hear you're selling alraune sake as a love potion, which is precisely the sort of thing they'll covet. Great idea."

"You know that much?"

"I researched a lot when I was in Heian. But—" Kunai narrowed her eyes. "At this rate, the group will just target the stores that carry the sake. No one in Heian knew where the sake was being made. Is the existence of this village public knowledge?"

"Huh?" Glenn was surprised. Hadn't the plan been to lure out the Black Widows by making sake in this village? They'd never come unless they *knew* about the village.

"Thank you for your insight," Souen bowed toward Kunai. "This is my own private land. If it became public knowledge that I'm secretly harboring monsters here, I would be risking my position."

"Is that so, Brother?" Glenn was surprised at first, but on second thought, he understood.

"You probably forget, since you've become so accustomed to Lindworm, but a monster village would never be tolerated this far east. I am the only one who knows there are monsters living on this island, and that we're brewing sake from monster products."

"Brother. Just a second." Glenn had a bad feeling.

In human-supremacist Heian, the discovery of monsters being harbored on private property would cause a scandal. Glenn wondered if Souen was planning something rash, like with the water canal poisoning, when he'd been rumored to be the culprit.

“Well...that said, the time is probably ripe. I will make the existence of this village known in the city of Heian.”

“C-can you do that?”

“*You* can do that. This is what we’ve been preparing for. I already have your research—recorded observations of your actual sister suffering from Demonitis, and a thesis from your mentor. We will use those materials to advance a strong argument that there is no difference between humans and demons, convincing the council of statesmen at the same time. I will stake the name of Souen Litbeit on it.”

It was an ingenious plan. He must have been planning it for quite a while.

“The true nature of Demonitis, discovered through the hard work of the Litbeit siblings. And also the truth that the love potion currently flying off shelves in Heian was made from materials harvested from alraune. The people of Heian have monster blood in their veins and are consuming monster products to boot. Add to that the fact that they’re living this close to monsters, and no one in the east who wishes to publicly chastise monsters will have a leg to stand on.”

“Are you sure? It sounds risky.”

“It must be done. There is always risk...though I never thought I’d be using the Demonitis trump card against the Black Widows.”

There was silence.

Souen, who’d promised to help Glenn acquire his father’s blessing, was saying this. In other words, he was prepared for what may come. His wicked older brother was going to help Glenn, no strings attached.

Souen was a powerful ally.

“I’m going to do whatever it takes to make this place like Lindworm someday,” Souen said.

Inside, Glenn was surprised. Souen often came to Lindworm, which he’d assumed was because he and Sioux were there, but it seemed he’d actually been harboring ambitions to further develop the human realm. He wanted to make a place where monsters and humans could live together.

Glenn’s brother was a politician through and through, which also made him an ambitious man.

“The Draconess wishes for this too. It would be wonderful if the ideals that have been achieved in Lindworm could be replicated in the east. Souen, I thank you.”

“Not at all. This wouldn’t be possible without Lindworm as an example.”

“That will please the Draconess to hear.” Kunai sighed.

“Obviously, the Draconess hopes for peace between humans and monsters, but there’s something else. She is concerned with the strange articles the Black Widows apparently possess.”

“Strange...articles?”

“Yeah. She’s wondering if perhaps my blueprints—or rather, my manufacturing notes?—are among the things the Widows have accumulated.”

This startled Glenn.

Kunai had been created in the east, cobbled together from dead flesh and then given life and personality through unimaginable magic. If a record of that process existed, it was only natural that the Black Widows would want it as part of their rare item collection.

“It’s true that information on the Black Widows is hard to find. But that information is precisely what the Draconess seeks.”

“She wants this information for you, Kunai?”

“That’s right. It makes me feel like a failure of a bodyguard, to have made my master worry...” Kunai smiled in self-deprecation. “But if that is her wish, then I will fulfill it. Souen, I request your aid. The Draconess desires to either annihilate the Black Widows or to secure what they’ve stolen. I must execute her orders, in addition to checking on Dr. Glenn and the others.”

“Oh, is that so?” Souen grinned creepily. That was the face he wore when he’d come up with a dastardly new idea. “Well, then, Guard. Would you like to go to Heian to sell sake with me?”

“Wha?”

“You are beautiful, Kunai. You were made from human parts, but you are clearly not human. You also dress in the eastern style. If you’ve already been collecting information in Heian, then people know your face. Doesn’t that make you perfect as a salesgirl—no, as the poster girl for monsters of the east?”

“I prefer not to draw attention—”

Kunai sounded confused. Her role was to stay by Skadi’s side and serve as her assistant, not come up with her own ideas on how to act. It seemed she was having trouble judging what to do for herself, without Skadi around.

“Two birds with one stone—you can interact more with the people of the east and take down the Black Widows at the same time. What do you say?”

“Uh...”

Souen was a good talker. For his strategy to be successful, he needed the alraune sake to reach as many people as possible. Kunai might be better suited to the task than a lamia, who was clearly not human at all. Especially considering the legend of the nun who ate mermaid meat.

“What do you think, Dr. Glenn?” Kunai asked, as if at a loss.

“If you don’t mind...we would like your help.”

“I’m sure you’ll do great. The Neikes family also uses beautiful women when selling medicine.” Sapphee agreed too.

Kunai still had a contemplative look on her face. She was a warrior. It was only natural she’d be thrown for a loop by being asked to help advertise products for sale. “My face is covered in scars...”

“If you want, we can cover it with makeup. But I think it would be good to leave it as evidence that you are undead.”

“I...don’t mind my scars. I’ve always had them. So—” Kunai balled her hand determinedly into a fist, her decision made. “I’ll help you with your plan. I’ll sell sake in Heian.”

“Are you sure?”

“Oh, but—” Kunai glanced over at Glenn. “We’ll have to do something about the smell.”

“The...smell?”

“Yeah. Even with preservatives, there’s no hiding the stench of death. I’m sure such a smell wouldn’t help with sales.”

Glenn tilted his head in thought. He’d never noticed a stench of death when talking to Kunai.

“I didn’t notice.”

“You’re just used to it,” Kunai said shortly. Since she was made of corpses, some odor would make sense, but he’d really never gotten a whiff of anything off of her.

Sapphee stuck out her tongue, trying to detect the scent, but couldn’t. “I can’t smell anything. You’re overreacting, Kunai.”

“No, the smell is strong. This is the perfect timing, Dr. Glenn. Will you help me with my preservation processing?”

Glenn couldn’t hide his surprise that Kunai, who hated doctors, would ask him for treatment on her own. This was probably her way of preparing to speak with people.

“So that’s my condition, Souen. I need some time to prepare my body.”

“Oh, oh... Of course, that’s not a problem, but—”

No matter how many times Glenn insisted that she didn’t smell, Kunai continued to frown and sniff her upper arms. He couldn’t help but chuckle at how it made her look like an adolescent girl.

“What am I doing here...?” said Arahnia

“What else do you have to do?” said Aluloona.

While Glenn was talking to Kunai, Aluloona was out with Arahnia, partly against the latter’s will. They were drinking sake while enjoying the plum blossoms along the river. Needless to say, it was the sake made from alraune flowers.

“Why dontcha just drink with your daughters?”

“None of them will put up with this old lady’s complaints. They just wanna go sightseeing. I tell ’em they’ll regret it if they don’t take care of their mama.”

“I don’t see how they could respect a mama who made so many kids, not knowing who the fathers are.”

“I’ve raised them with plenty of love. And they get big allowances,” Aluloona complained as she drank.

Of course, it was precisely because she was both rich *and* a sex addict that she could pull that off. A normal person could never manage it.

“A mother...”

The feelings that Arahnia had been pushing to the back of her mind came bubbling out with the sake. She normally loved sake, but today, she couldn't even taste it. She just felt a sweetness tickle her throat.

“How is the sake?”

“I...don't really know. I'm just not in the mood right now.”

“Hmph, that's not like you. But, well, drink up anyway.”

Insolent as Aluloona was, Arahnia, who lived near the Radon red light district and made the clothes worn by the escorts there, couldn't afford to flatly refuse her. She watched Aluloona touch her lips to her sake and wondered to herself if plants could drink alcohol. Aluloona normally drank water through her vines, so it seemed odd to Arahnia that she would only drink alcohol through her mouth.

Then she noticed that the roots that stretched from Aluloona's bulb were immersed in the river. Perhaps she was counteracting the alcohol by absorbing water from the river.

“So I heard you told the young doctor that you're happy being his mistress.”

“Yeah. Well...” Where had Aluloona heard that?

“Are you really that indifferent? You've always wanted what everyone else had.”

There was silence.

Aluloona knew Arahnia's bad habits well. But as a person who lived true to her own desires, she didn't let that affect how she treated her, not even the fact that Arahnia had stolen someone else's lover and then discarded them. Maybe Aluloona only thought of heartbroken men as potential Radon District patrons.

“Don't remind me.”

“Oooh.”

“I don't want things that belong to others. I have something that's important to me, and only me...and I don't want to ruin it. I don't want

to steal anything. Instead of a complicated relationship with me, I'd rather the Doc had a happy life with Sapphee..."

That was how Arahnia truly felt. Maybe the alcohol had loosened her tongue. Either way, Aluloona was the only person she could ever say this to, and it was exactly why Aluloona invited her for drinks.

Arahnian knew that.

"I like the Doc."

"Mmm"

"But Sapphee is an important friend to me. So...if they can be happy together, I don't care what happens to me, whether I'm a mistress or whatever. I just don't want something to happen between them 'cuz of me. If something were to happen because of the Black Widows that my ma left behind...I..."

"Would that truly make you happy?"

Arahnian shifted, unsure of how to respond to Aluloona.

"Nothing good will come from hoping for the happiness of others without considering your own happiness at all."

"But—"

"Just look at me. I live according to my desires, seeking my own happiness."

"It doesn't look that way. Aren't you the philanthropist of Lindworm?"

Aluloona chuckled. She had a reputation as a money-grubbing monster who was also a philanthropist and passionate about welfare, but, well...she wasn't really a fan of that moniker.

"Me, a philanthropist? Do you wanna hear a story?"

"Uh, yes?"

"Let's say there were starving children in Lindworm—there aren't, but just hypothetically."

"Okay."

"So I would donate money to them. Is that mercy? Is it welfare? Do you think that makes me kind, Arahnian?"

Arahnian thought for a moment.

“Well, yeah, I think it’s kind.”

“Really? But once those kids have money, they’re just going to turn around and buy food from the plantation.”

“Ah...”

“Kids buy crops too. That turns into sales for the plantation, then becomes my money. Then I’ll distribute the money again—so around and around it goes. That’s how an economy works,”

Aluloona laughed.

She was the center of Lindworm’s economy. She donated large sums to the Council because she was rich, allowing Lindworm to carry out large-scale construction projects without worrying about cost. This, in turn, created jobs and helped the city flourish.

“What are you trying to say?”

“The fortunes you can’t see work the same way,” Aluloona let out a big breath. “There are things that make you happy just by being happy themselves. There are things that make you sad when they are too. You know who I’m talking about.”

Arahnia was silent.

“Happiness might not have a tangible representation like paper money does, but it works the same way. When there is give and take, everyone profits. If you act without any consideration for your own happiness, it will dam up the flow. That won’t make anyone happy.”

Arahnia had no words to answer Lindworm’s safekeeper. Comparing money to happiness might seem short-sighted, but to Aluloona, money was only a means to an end. What she desired was passion, not things. In that sense, she *was* satisfying her own desires.

Perhaps Arahnia’s mother, who was hated by her own daughters, was the complete opposite of Aluloona.

“Why don’t you think about your own happiness a bit more?” Aluloona drained her glass.

“I don’t know,” Arahnia’s glass had emptied at some point too. Apparently, she’d drunk it all without any appreciation for the taste. “I have no problem hoping for the Doc’s happiness—but I have no idea what it means for me to be happy.”

“Heh. So that’s why you just hope for the young doctor. Sounds

like love to me.” Aluloona laughed gently, as if she were speaking to one of her daughters. “Think about it. You’ll be satisfied if the young doctor is satisfied. And marrying you will satisfy him.”

“You’re so thoughtful about the needs of others, Aluloona. You save prostitutes, operate an orphanage...you really do like meddling, don’t you?”

“I told you. My happiness comes from the satisfaction of others.” Aluloona laughed again. “When I help distribute both money and happiness, it benefits me the most. My happiness lies at the very center of it all. So ultimately, I’ve only ever sought to satisfy myself.”

“Must be hard to be so calculating.”

Considering how economies worked, Aluloona was probably telling the truth, though. It wasn’t *just* self-interest—this was her personal philosophy. Even knowing how her mind worked, Arahnia couldn’t help but let her true feelings slip. Much as she disliked it, she couldn’t help but lean on Aluloona. She was eating out of the palm of the alraune’s hand.

“Is there anything you *dislike*, Aluloona?” Arahnia asked, intending it to be a jab.

“Yeah.”

“Oh? What’s that?”

“I told you. I satisfy my own desires by keeping the economy moving. So I hate people who interrupt the circulation of wealth, hoarding profits for themselves without spending any of it to support others—you get it?”

Arahnia shook her head.

Aluloona drained her glass, looking annoyed. “Those people are thieves—in other words, the Black Widows.”

The normally good-natured alraune spat the group’s name as if it tasted foul. It was rare to see her angry. Arahnia giggled a little, feeling like she’d gotten a glimpse into the depths of Aluloona’s heart. A perfect complement to the sake.

Kunai Zenow had agreed to help them sell sake but was apparently still concerned about her smell. No matter how many times he sniffed her, Glenn could detect no scent of decay, but he proceeded with the preparations she'd requested nonetheless.

"Doctor, I was able to make a preservative with materials from the village."

"Oh, thank you, Sapphee."

Glenn looked at the bottle she'd brought him. The preservatives used to embalm corpses were toxic to living beings—even just inhaling the fumes could make you ill. It must have been difficult for Sapphee to brew an equivalent from what she could find in an unfamiliar village. That she'd managed to accomplish the task anyway stood testament to her skill as a pharmacist.

"Thank you, Lady Saphentite."

"Don't mention it. I'm just doing my job." Sapphee grinned.

There were regular undead patients at the Lindworm clinic. Special care had to be taken in handling the preservatives, but they were still vital supplies for a monster clinic to have.

Glenn faced Kunai in a room of the cottage he'd borrowed. The tools he prepared included a knife, the preservative, a bottle for the used preservative, and a cork for the bottle. Corks were hard to find in the east, so he was using one he'd brought from Lindworm.

"Thank you, Doctor."

"Umm...Kunai, you really don't smell, you know?"

"D-don't sniff me!" Kunai held her arms over her chest, as if to shield herself from Glenn. "I told you, you're just used to it! You're always doing my sutures and always going to the graveyard district! You've probably completely lost your sense of smell!"

"That's not true..." Glenn chuckled.

Kunai was convinced she had a stench and there was no changing her mind. Glenn believed it was his job as a doctor to put her anxiety at ease, and preservative treatments were a necessity for the undead, anyway.

"I must end the Black Widows, as per the orders of the Draconess. And...I want to gain possession of my blueprints, which the group is

said to have,” Kunai admitted, her expression dead serious.

“Do you...wonder about your origins, Kunai?”

“Hmm? Oh, honestly I don’t care about myself at all.”

“Huh?” There was so little hesitation in her reply that Glenn asked for follow-up without thinking.

“This body is a corpse. It is flesh that contradicts the laws of nature. I believe that flesh should be returned to the earth. The fact is that if the Draconess hadn’t taken me in, this body would have decayed eventually.”

“So then—”

“But the Draconess is kind. This body is currently immortal, thanks to her magic, but if I had the research notes from my developer, then I believe she can make use of me for an even longer time. If I had a deeper understanding of the source of this body’s life, it would put less of a burden on the Draconess.”

So those were the intentions behind Skadi’s orders to Kunai. She was thinking of her guard.

“I don’t care personally, but I want to get hold of the developer’s designs so that I can continue to serve the Draconess for a long time. I’m sorry for the trouble, Dr. Glenn, but please help me.”

“I will do everything in my power to aid you.”

With Skadi’s longevity, she needed assistants who could also live a long time. Kunai was unwavering in her loyalty, making her perfect for the job. Glenn’s skills were necessary for her to continue to serve as long as possible.

“Let’s get started, then. Please lay on the exam table.”

“Mmm,”

Kunai nodded.

There were no hospital beds in the east like there were in the west, so they were using a makeshift exam table made from a piece of wood with a cloth pulled over it. Kunai lay facedown on the table, and Glenn first touched the scroll on her cervical spine.

“Excuse me.”

The scroll held together the metal parts that served as Kunai’s

cervical spine and vertebrae. As Kunai had explained to him earlier, this was where the scroll made contact with her dead flesh. He removed the clasp on her back with a clinking sound. The metal, firmly embedded in the dead flesh, loosened, and he lifted it straight up. It was made of iron, and it was heavy.

“Did you get it off? Be careful.”

“Yes, I know.” Glenn held the metal that the scroll was embedded in in his hand. It was hard to believe that this scroll was the true Kunai.

He carefully removed the metal, exposing a number of red tubes that ran through her body. If he severed any of these, it would likely completely cut off her connection with the dead flesh.

This is an uncanny surgery.

He had no idea what went on inside her. There were areas around Kunai’s exposed neck where dead flesh melded with metal, and Glenn couldn’t begin to imagine the technology that made it work.

“You can see the metal holes around my head?” Though 80 percent of Kunai’s neck was detached, she was talking like normal. As she said, there were small holes at the joints where he had removed the parts.

“Y-yes.”

“Run the preservative through there. Then it will run through my entire body.”

Embalming was a basic method of preserving corpses. For a normal corpse, preservative fluid would be run through the veins, starting around the cervical spine, and being switched out for fresh fluid every so often. Besides suturing her flesh, Kunai had also probably performed such maintenance on her body herself.

“These holes—but your veins are always empty, right?”

“Yeah. When treating conventional corpses, the preservative is left in the body, but I was built for battle, so my limbs blow off often. It wouldn’t do for poison to fly through the air every time...so after the preservative is absorbed by the dead flesh, I have it siphoned out...”

“I see.”

When he first met Kunai, the sutures in her veins had been poorly done, which meant the preservative injections had probably been

neglected as well. Glenn was guessing that she had been rough on her body, figuring it would decay sooner or later. She might be made of dead flesh, but he wished she'd take better care of herself.

"Do you normally prepare the preservative yourself?"

"No...sometimes I have the Draconess or the manager help me. Either way, I never used the vein method until you treated me."

"I see...well, then, I'm going to get started. I'll do my best," Glenn said. He didn't think he would be as skilled as Molly—an embalming expert—but he was skilled in his own way.

Sapphee inserted a transparent tube with metal end-caps into one of the holes.

"Mmm," Kunai moaned.

She couldn't feel pain, but she could *feel*. Apparently, she couldn't help but react when a foreign object was inserted in her body.

"Now, we will start running the preservative through your body."

"Mm. Pl-please..."

Sapphee was using a manual bellows-shaped pump to inject the preservative into Kunai's veins. The liquid made a slurping sound as it was sucked out of the bottle and transferred into Kunai's body.

"Mm. Mmm." Kunai moaned out loud with every pump.

Glenn wondered what it felt like to have such a large amount of poison run directly through your veins. As a human, he'd never know.

The poison had a faint floral scent. Was it derived from *alraune*? Or had Sapphee added something in an attempt to perfume it? A waft of the scent was emitted with each pump of the poison that spread the poison through Kunai.

There was a faint blue tint to the preservative. This was so it would be easy to identify from outside her body.

"Kunai, when was the last time you injected preservative?"

"Six months ago..."

"Please get treatment at least once a month," Sapphee advised her frankly.

"I-I want to do it regularly. But besides guarding the Draconess...I have been asked to train the arena warriors...there's just not enough

time...”

“I know you’re busy, but...” Sapphee was exasperated.

As an undead, there was no escaping decay. All living material eventually broke down. Kunai’s dead flesh had been processed properly, but that just made maintenance all the more important. If she neglected preservative injections, there would be no stopping the flesh from rotting.

So that’s why she was so worried about smelling?

Glenn finally understood why Kunai was constantly concerned about the stench of death and decay. She was so busy guarding the Draconess that it left her no time to take care of herself. She was so steadfast in her work that she probably never even left Skadi’s side to take a break.

Now she was being pumped through with preservative. Once a bottle was emptied, they put the end of the tube in the next one, using the suction opening in the cork so that the medicine could be siphoned out without the poison vaporizing.

“Mmm...ergh.”

“How do you feel?”

“Mmm, it’s going well. Mmm.” Kunai looked like she was fine. Once all the medicine was injected, they would leave her for one hour and then siphon it all out again. That would complete the treatment.

“Is it all in?” Glenn asked as he checked that the bottles were empty.

“Erm...”

“Kunai? Are you all right?” Glenn asked.

Kunai frowned, groaning in response. She lifted her head.

“I feel like—I don’t know, my stomach is heavy, but maybe I’m just imagining it.”

“Heavy?”

Glenn tilted his head in thought.

“Excuse me, let me examine you.”

He touched Kunai’s abdomen as she lay on the table, pressing gently to check the organs underneath the muscles of her torso.

“Mm, mmm...!”

“Ahh...this is—”

Along with the sensation of internal organs, he felt something like water. Glenn knew right away what had happened.

“The injected preservative has leaked.”

“What?!”

“I believe the preservative has leaked from a vein somewhere, and it has now accumulated in your stomach. I’m sorry, I should have checked your veins ahead of time...” Glenn sighed.

“Oh, I guess that could happen.”

He touched Kunai’s abdomen again, jiggling it gently this time. Luckily, there didn’t seem to be a lot of preservative accumulated in her stomach. He didn’t know which vein it had leaked from, but he’d need to treat this.

“Do we need to start over?”

“No, that would take a long time—we should inject additional preservative from another location.”

“Hmm?”

Glenn touched Kunai’s skin. There was some flesh with poor coloring, but upon closer inspection, the internal veins were see-through. The veins injected with preservative were particularly distinctive, bulging slightly and with a blue tint to them.

He examined her arms, abdomen, and legs.

“Ahh, it’s not reaching your legs,” Glenn said, noticing there were no blue veins in her legs. The expression on Kunai’s face changed.

“M-my legs...”

“There is a blood vessel in the thigh called the femoral artery. It’s the perfect place, so let’s inject the preservative there.”

“O-okay...”

Kunai didn’t look excited about it. Glenn recalled that Kunai had reacted strongly when he sutured her leg in the past. Apparently, her legs were sensitive.

“I’ll make an incision in your inner thigh and insert the tube there.”

“U-uhh...W-will it be okay? I might be too loud...”

“Hopefully not... When I sutured your leg in the past, I remember a large blood vessel. I know exactly where it is, so the treatment will go quickly.”

“You’ve certainly become my primary physician—” Kunai sighed, as if she had given up. “Fine, do it.”

“Yes. Now, then, can you please sit up? And open your legs a little...”

“O-oh, yes.”

Kunai lifted herself up. She bent both her knees and spread her legs. Her tunic covered the region between her legs, but her bare thighs pushed it up to her groin. Although he was going to end up exposing it anyway, since the femoral artery was on her inner thigh...

“Sapphee, please watch her neck,” Glenn instructed.

“Yes. I’ll check the carotid artery.” Sapphee nodded as if she already knew exactly what to do.

“Okay, then...”

What Glenn pulled out of his bag next was the same type of rubber tube with metal on the ends that they’d been using so far. The metal tip was cut at an angle. He looked carefully at the sharp tip, which looked like it would easily pierce skin.

“I’m going to insert this tube,” Glenn said, picking up his scalpel.

He moved his head closer to the space between her open legs. Next, he cut into the femoral artery on Kunai’s inner thigh.

“Mmm...”

He cut deep. On the other side of the incision, he could see a thick vessel. Glenn relentlessly cut this part away with the surgical scalpel.

“Ooh, mmm...” Even Kunai couldn’t help but moan at a cut blood vessel.

If she’d been human, cutting freely into a thick blood vessel would lead to blood gushing forth, but Kunai’s veins were empty.

“Now, I’m going to insert it.”

“Mm, mmm, ahhh...”

Glenn inserted the tip of the tube in the blood vessel from the

incision.

“Mm, mm erg.”

“Please tell me if you feel pain. I don’t think any of your organs will be hurt—”

“It doesn’t hurt but—mm, oh, it’s a little cold.”

Glenn groped inside Kunai’s body, trying to situate the tube without being able to see where it went. Of course, randomly moving the sharp tip ran the risk of injuring the inside of the blood vessels. He needed to keep movement to a minimum, but he also needed to insert the tube deeply so it wouldn’t come out.

“Mmm, argh.” Kunai moaned at the sensation of the cold metal creeping in her body.

Inserting such an object without anesthesia would be impossible if she weren’t undead. Kunai didn’t feel pain, but she was having a hard time tolerating a foreign object in her body.

“Ahh...oooh...”

“I think that should do it...now we will start the injection.”

“I-It feels so weird—to have something on the inside of my leg,” Kunai said, biting her lip.

This was probably more because the foreign object was unbearable than because she was embarrassed.

“I’ll go slowly.”

“I-I think faster is better—mmm, ahhh.”

Glenn started operating the pump, injecting the preservative.

“Mmm, ahhh..., erghh...”

Kunai moaned some more.

“K-Kunai?”

“I-I’m okay. It’s the sensation of liquid...mmm, ohhh...!” Kunai’s leg was trembling. “Ah, mmm-ah...whaaa!”

Glenn continued to pump in more preservative. The blood vessels in Kunai’s thigh started to turn blue, showing that the preservative was flowing well through the blood vessels.

“Mmm, erg, ergggh...”

“But you’re so strong in battle, Kunai—” Sapphee said unexpectedly.

“Sh-shut up! M-my legs are weeeak!” She was slurring her words.

They couldn’t spend too much time on the procedure, so Glenn ignored her reaction and kept pumping in the preservative. With each pump, the pressure stimulated her blood vessel, and Kunai couldn’t help but react.

“Mmm! Ah, whaaa, mmm!”

Glenn started to think people might misunderstand what he was doing here, like with the Saki situation. He had told everyone that he would be treating Kunai, so it shouldn’t be a problem...he thought.

“Please try not to move, Kunai.”

“Z-zat’s easy for you to shay...ahh, mmm!”

Kunai couldn’t stop her reactions.

He wondered why she only had this reaction in her legs. Maybe, if he could get hold of the blueprints that the Black Widows supposedly had, he could figure it out.

“We have no choice—Sapphee?”

“Yes. It is unavoidable.”

There was a slithering sound and Sapphee’s snake body wrapped around Kunai. She bound both of Kunai’s wrists.

Kunai was now held with both of her arms lifted into the air. Naturally, she wasn’t actually suspended, but still sitting on the bed with her legs spread.

“Wh-what are you doing?!” Kunai protested loudly.

“I’m sorry, but if you move too much, it could damage the inside of your blood vessel.”

“I-I told you this position...mmm, gyahh!”

“I’m really sorry, but this is treatment.” Glenn ignored her protests.

He continued operating the pump, attempting to finish as soon as possible. The preservative siphoned from the bottle was inserted into Kunai’s leg.

“Gyah, ahh! Mmm!”

Glenn watched the preservative infusion flow through the tube. Kunai's leg was twitching, but he held it still at her ankle.

With Sapphee's help, they were able to keep Kunai pretty still.



“Mmmahh...mm, mmm...! Oh, gyaaaah...!”

“I’m sorry, just a little more.”

“Oooh, mmmaahhh...”

There were tears in Kunai’s eyes.

She wasn’t supposed to have functioning tear ducts, based on what he knew of her body, so it was probably protective liquid for her eyeballs.

“Mmm!”

“I’m sorry, Kunai. Please hold on a bit longer,” Glenn said. Kunai scowled.

“Y-you...you’ve been saying that all along! Ahh, mmmahh, gyahh, gyahhh.”

Glenn kept pumping, as he determined that the preservative hadn’t reached everywhere in her lower limbs.

“Oooh, e-enough already...mmm! M-my legs are reaching the limit!”

“Do you feel any pain?”

“I...d-don’t feel pain...b-but there’s pressure like lifting or pulling...it feels strange—ahh, gyahh.”

Kunai, both hands bound, looked like she didn’t know how to react.

Glenn pumped harder. When he was especially forceful, he could see the blood vessels in Kunai’s inner thigh bulging.

“Ahh, gyahh, mmm-yahhh-mmm...! Y-you’ve been sticking it in and taking it out of my body...ah, ahhh.”

Kunai’s entire body was trembling.

Glenn concentrated, injecting the last bit of the preservative into Kunai.

“Mmm, mmm! Gyahhh, oooh!”

Kunai’s voice grew louder.

Glenn checked to make sure the treatment was complete and pulled out the tube.

“Ahh, ahh...mmmahhh...”

Kunai collapsed on the treatment table, as if exhausted.

“How do I smell?” Kunai asked after the treatment was all complete.

There was a floral scent in the air, and needless to say, there was no stench of death. Kunai was now sitting on the treatment table, concerned about her own odor.

“I think you smell nice.”

“We removed all of the preservative. These bottles hold the preservative that ran through your body. The pieces of flesh floating in it are because you waited so long to perform maintenance on your body. The scent will disappear in about one week—”

“That’s plenty, Lady Sapphee. Maybe we’ll get the chance again soon.”

Sapphee seemed satisfied with the effects of her specially made preservative, and Glenn caught a rare glimpse of a proud expression on her face.

“But—this treatment was rough. Isn’t there another way?”

“I’m sorry...but it’s because you were moving so much.”

“Sh-shut up! How many times do I have to tell you that my legs are sensitive?”

The hem of Kunai’s clothing was covering her leg.

It was too short, so to be honest, it wasn’t serving any form of protection. However, Kunai probably felt helpless.

“Well, I think that you should be the last person to protest treatment, Kunai.” Sapphee made an outrageous comment.

“Wh-what do you mean by that? Sapphee...”

“I mean exactly what I said. For some reason, Tisalia, Lulala, Arahnia...and even Skadi and probably Plum are after him. It’s like every time he treats someone. he gains a new candidate for a lover.”

“I have no such intentions.” Glenn was only seriously treating his patients.

Sapphee let out a big sigh in response to this.

“I just think it might be a good thing if there was at least one patient who complained about the doctor. I’m sure Kunai won’t become a candidate for marriage, at least.”

“Hahaha. You’re strict, Lady Saphentite. It’s true that I don’t have an ounce of interest in Dr. Glenn.” Kunai chuckled.

Glenn already knew that, but for some illogical reason, he felt rejected.

“This is my body. Nothing good would come from wedding the living, and anyway, I am busy taking care of the Draconess. I don’t plan on ever being married, so don’t even think about it.”

“Well that makes me feel better.”

“But, well—”

Kunai didn’t stop.

She glanced over at Glenn. For some reason, she was lustfully gazing not at his face, but at his body from the neck down.

“Once Dr. Glenn dies, maybe I’ll take some of that flesh for myself.”

“What?!”

“I’m interested in what the deceased Dr. Glenn would say to me. How about it, Dr. Glenn? Let me make a reservation for part of your dead body. Hmmm—I definitely want those skillful fingers.”

“Well, I, er...”

Kunai’s face was getting closer, like a predator with her gaze bent on Glenn’s flesh. It made him think about what the purpose of a body was after death. It was true that Kunai’s body was made of parts from both men and women, but—

Just then, Sapphee’s tail let out a warning rattle.

“A-absolutely not! I will not allow it!”

“C’mon. You don’t have to be so stingy. It’s a corpse.”

“I. Said. No! Even after he dies, Dr. Glenn is mine!”

“No one likes women who are that jealous.”

“I-I’m not jealous!”

Glenn laughed out loud. He'd never thought about what would happen to his body after he died.

Sapphee was adamant, but Kunai was completely indifferent.

"No one knows what happens when you die, you know," Kunai said.

The statement bothered Glenn a bit. But the fact that Kunai, who usually hated doctors, would say such a thing made him think that people—no, monsters—really could change remarkably.

Several days passed, and Glenn and the others gathered on a slightly elevated hill on the outskirts of the village.

"I sold sake in Heian. I saw some gangs of people with nasty looks on their faces—but that was probably more due to the novelty of a corpse selling a monster's product. They were buying it like crazy."

"Thank you, Kunai. Now, about that..."

Kunai and the others looked down at the sea. There were a number of ships in the water that seemed to be surrounding the island. Glenn couldn't tell from up here, but Sioux had gone to check them out, and she's reported that there were armed warriors on them.

"I guess our village has been found out."

"Yeah—to be more accurate, they found out that monsters are hiding on Souen's land."

"What are they thinking, surrounding the island just because there are monsters on it?" Sapphee was disgusted.

Most of the ships gathered around the island were onlookers who were either prejudiced against or curious about monsters. Souen had to be desperately explaining the situation to the council of statesmen, which served as the governing body of the human realm, right about now.

"Well, they're just watching from a distance now. I wonder if there are any members of the Black Widows in there." Kunai strained her eyes to see.

Even if there were ships that belonged to the Black Widows, they wouldn't be able to tell from so far away. From their perch, they could see about fifteen ships, and there were surely others not visible to them from here.

"This is Souen's private property. Not even one of the elder statesmen could set foot on it without his permission...though Heian is in some chaos right now. The idea that every family has demon blood in it has spread," Saki told them quietly.

She had a sword in her hand, ready in case the unthinkable happened.

"Then again, they've always rejected demons. Heian *should* be in an uproar right now." Saki giggled gently.

Perhaps she had some pent-up resentment against the human realm. She normally didn't show it, but she had plenty of reason to.

"The results of the doctor's treatment changed the human realm," Sapphee offered.

Souen had made a shocking announcement with a thesis based on Glenn's medical records. It included the facts that demons and humans were the same species, sharing the same ancestors. And that humans had had demon blood in their veins for a very long time.

"I didn't intend to change anything," Glenn responded. "It's simply the truth that I treated Sioux. I suppose it's only to be expected that the human realm would make a fuss about it. Human society, its prejudice against demons... All I did was what should be done..."

"That's the doctor I know," Sapphee smiled.

Glenn didn't think of this as an accomplishment. No human prejudice could change medical fact. All he'd done was discover the hidden truth.

Nonetheless, he and Souen were currently being blamed in Heian for "Spreading heretical ideas that humans and demons were the same." For the most part, humans only saw what they wanted to. It was hardly a scientific attitude, so Glenn tended to ignore it, but it wasn't quite as easy for Souen, who lived in Heian.

Just then—

"We're back!"

“Er, yes!”

Glenn’s thoughts were interrupted.

Tisalia with her spear and Sioux with her sword stood before him. Apparently, they’d been training together in their free time and had become quite close. This made them look like sisters—albeit sisters who didn’t look alike.

“Welcome back, Tisalia. How was it?” Sapphee asked.

Tisalia looked proud. “We made rounds of the entire island, but there is no one suspicious to be found.”

“We even went deep into the mountains. There is no sign of the Black Widows infiltrating... At least for the time being, there are none on this island!”

Such was the verdict of the makeshift patrol team of two. With Tisalia’s hooves, cantering around the island was easy. In addition to Sioux’s experience as a warrior, she had a unique ability for sensing presence using her demon horns. She was more than qualified to patrol the village and seek out suspicious insurgents.

“Thank you very much, both of you. I will be on alert too. Please continue your patrol,” Saki said, bowing her head.

“Leave the village guard to me. Lulala will tell us if a suspicious ship approaches...I’ll mop the floor with the insolent bandits.” Kunai cracked her knuckles.

Kunai was much better suited to working security than being a sake salesgirl. With so many experienced fighters on their side, even if the Black Widows did attack, they could nab them all up in one go. It was the ideal situation.

“Doc.”

“Huh?”

Glenn’s thoughts were interrupted again by someone stroking his neck. Surprised, he turned to see Arahnia was standing behind him.

“Heh. Did I surprise you?”

“Arahnia...”

“I set up a bunch of thread traps around the village. There’s no way they’ll see the traps in the dark... If they’re careless and get caught, I’ll know. The traps are perfect.”

“Th-thank you so much. You didn’t have to,” Glenn said, but Arahnia’s expression was stern.

“I would never forgive myself if something were to happen to you. The Doc can’t get hurt because of his mistress.”

“Nothing is your fault, Arahnia.”

Arahnia was silent. She probably hadn’t changed her mind. She remained quiet, a complicated expression on her face. Even if the village were perfectly protected, Glenn wondered if she’d be able to get his father’s blessing at this rate.

He couldn’t stop worrying.

“Souen will be back in a day or two,” Saki piped up. “The Black Widows will probably come eventually, but these precautions should make it hard for them to steal from us. I’m very sorry to cause everyone trouble, but thank you for your cooperation.”

She bowed her head again. The monsters in charge of protecting the village nodded enthusiastically together.

But—

All their preparation and precautions would be in vain.

It was only a few days later that Souen’s village was set on fire and pillaged by the Black Widows.

Case 04: The Pheromonal Arachne

THE ATTACK on the village took only a moment.

Men in masks—the Black Widows—came out of nowhere in the middle of the night, pilfering the village in an instant.

They somehow got past not only Tisalia and Sioux, but also Arahnia's warning traps, undetected.

The first thing they did was set fire to the mansion.

Saki, who was in charge of the village, prioritized getting out all the residents of the building, enlisting the help of Tisalia. But, while they were busy with that, the sake was stolen from the cellar.

It all happened in an instant, perfectly coordinated.

Saki had no choice but to prioritize the lives of the residents. While she was distracted with them, they took exactly what they came for.

There was nothing the people of the village could do against their perfect execution.

There were sounds of wood cracking.

The smell of burning wood filled the air—it was a horrid smell.

Lulala flung up water from the river. Thanks to her webbed hands, the water was steadily subduing the flames.

The buildings near the river suffered minimum damage, thanks to Lulala and the other mermaids. But—

“I’m so sorry...” Saki said, biting her lip as she gazed at the buildings that had burned to the ground. She had a mild burn on her arm, to which Glenn applied ointment, and then he wrapped the wound.

Most of the buildings set on fire were warehouses without residents. One, however, was the building where all the orphan child monsters stayed. Apparently, the adults in the village took turns watching over them. Saki happened to be with them this time and had saved the children from the burning house. They said she'd somehow lifted a burning pillar that had toppled over—an incredible feat.

“Glenn, how is it?” Souen asked worriedly.

“Saki’s demon skin is tough. It’s a minor burn.”

That said, the building she’d been in had burned down to the ground. The damage done to the village was substantial.

“We were unprepared—I never imagined arson.”

“I’ve treated it with medicine, so I don’t think it will leave a scar. Is anyone else hurt?”

“I think it’s just me. Thank you, little brother.”

All the children were unscathed. One little arachne girl was covered in soot and whimpering. It was the girl Arahnia had been teaching. At first, Glenn thought it was because she was scared, but... for some reason, she was apologizing to Arahnia.

“I’m sorry... Arahnia... Your ball burned...”

“It’s fine, it’s fine. I’m so glad you’re okay, Tsumu. I’ll make you an even better one.” Arahnia drew the crying child into a hug. “The arsonists who did this...they’ll get what’s coming to them.”

She had an easygoing smile on her face, like always, but Glenn didn’t miss the fact that her eyes were ice-cold. The Black Widows’ actions had left her furious.

“Doctor, the fires have been put out,” Sapphee slithered up to him. There was a bucket hanging from her tail, probably used for fire extinguishing.

“Thank you. Are you all right, Sapphee?”

“I’m just fine. But...” Sapphee looked around.

There was the injured Saki. The children, burned out of their home. Aluloona’s daughters, who feared fire. And the smell of burning earth and wood still lingered in the air.

Houses in the east were made of wood, which only helped the fire spread. In Heian, arson was considered a crime worse than murder.

Souen stared at the burnt-down houses. Glenn could tell that his clenched fists held the words of anger he couldn't get out.

"They'll pay..."

"Yeah, we have to do something."

This had gone far beyond needing Glenn's father's blessing to marry Arahnia. They could never forgive someone who would attack a village where monsters lived.

"Brother, you're back!"

A loud voice echoed through the village as Tisalia, Sioux, and Kunai—the three warriors—suddenly appeared. They were all covered in dirt, tree leaves, and branches. They must have been deep in the woods.

"Sioux, did you find them?!"

"It is unfortunate...we lost the Black Widows in the woods."

"You lost them? But you could track any bandit," Souen frowned. Sioux looked defeated.

"They ran into the mountains, then scattered. The way they moved was chaotic...Sioux believes they dispersed that way to throw off anyone following them."

"Even with my able legs...I couldn't keep up in the mountains..." Tisalia said, also sounding defeated. Centaur hooves were made for galloping on flat ground.

"But if they've scattered, how will they escape the island?" Souen asked.

It was Kunai who answered.

"We saw escape boats. They must have come to the island separately, in small boats that only carry one or two people, then gathered in the village. Since they came ashore in those boats, our surveillance didn't pick them up."

"Dammit. It's the same thing again! How can they be so coordinated if they only meet at the site of the crime?! Are the Black Widows ninjas or something?!" Souen cried out, unable to control his anger.

"Souen, calm down," Saki said.

“How can I calm down?! How many years did we spend building this village that they just burned down, injuring you? And after all that, we can’t even trace them!”

Baiting the Black Widows had been Souen’s idea, which was probably partly responsible for his regret. The fact that his own strategy led to his fiancé getting hurt left him even more upset.

“And as a bonus, they left us this note. *Cretins*. I won’t let them make a fool of me!”

“A note?”

“This. Look,” Souen said, handing over a piece of paper.

Glenn spread out the crinkled paper. It was composed in the eastern text, in messy calligraphy.

“We receive the curious monster village specialty as an offering to Arachnida Black Widows.”

An impudent, one-sided notice, written in eastern-style ink. He could feel the fanaticism with no doubts of their own morality.

“Damnit...” It wasn’t like Glenn to swear. But to think they’d set the fires and left this arrogant message behind... He was gripping the paper so tightly that he ripped it without meaning to.

“Doc, hey—” Arahnia snatched the paper from him from the side.

“Arahnia? Wha—”

“I’ve been wondering. I had thread traps set up all around the village, but the Black Widows got around them. Even if they could dodge Tisalia and Sioux’s patrol, they shouldn’t have made it past arachne traps. There must be more to this.” Arahnia scanned the remainder of the letter with her sharp eyes.

But she wasn’t looking at the text—she was looking at the back of the paper.

“I can read it...”

“What do you mean? There’s nothing written there,” Sapphee said, peering over at the blank back of the paper.

“It’s written in scent. That’s the best I can do to describe it. It has a scent that only arachne can recognize... I’m not sure how to explain it,” Arahnia said, looking at Glenn. “But this is a relief.”

“Huh? Arahnia?”

“I’m sorry for all the trouble I’ve caused you with the Black Widows, Doc...but now, I can finally help. If it works, that means I came this far for a reason.”

Glenn cocked his head to the side. Arahnia looked back at him with a sense of resolution in her countenance.

“Saki?” she called out, grinning.

“Yes?”

“Can you loan me some calligraphy ink?”

Souen’s residence had escaped the fire untouched. Currently gathered in it were the Litbeit siblings, Saki, and Glenn’s fiancées. Obviously, they were there to discuss the Black Widow arsonists.

“What are you doing, Arahnia?” Even Aluloona was there. As a plant-type monster, she was especially afraid of fire. All of her daughters were unharmed, but her face was stern.

“Arahnia...says she has a link to the Black Widows.”

“Oh?”

Arahnia held the letter left by the Black Widows, running a brush over the back of it. A designer by trade, her movements were elegant. Everyone in attendance watched.

“There it is...” she said, putting the brush down.

The back of the Black Widows’ letter was now packed with text—all of which Arahnia had just filled in. Glenn rubbed his eyes. It was a sea of eastern characters, and while they weren’t perfect, he noticed a date and time right away. The date was yesterday and the time was the exact time that the village was attacked.

“This is—”

“Yeah...the procedure for attacking the village is written here in detail.”

It had the date. It had the location of the village. It had the positions of the homes in the village and the warehouse where the sake

was stored. It also had instructions for coming ashore and escaping via the mountains. Their entire plan of attack was written on that small piece of paper.

“What is this? Watermarking? Invisible writing?”

All of this information had been hiding on the back of the paper that they thought was blank.

Arahnia shook her head in response to Souen’s questions. “No, it’s arachne pheromones.”

“Pheromones?”

“I guess you can think of it as...a scent. We can write words using scents.”

“Sorry. Glenn, Can you explain?” Souen looked to Glenn for more details.

Glenn read over the plan of attack that Arahnia had transcribed. “Pheromones are substances used mainly by insect and plant monsters. It’s an attractant generated by living things, used to induce certain behavior.”

“So that means...?”

“Umm, for example... Aluloona’s pollen contains pheromones that have effects to encourage reproduction. In that case, it’s called a meiosis-inducing substance.”

Aluloona guffawed, probably because Glenn had real-life experience being on the receiving end of those pheromones. But setting that aside—

“I guess the Black Widows used this paper, with colorless and odorless text on it, to communicate their plan of attack,” Glenn said. “It looks like a normal letter, and humans can’t read it. This is how they coordinate their attacks without having a base of operations.”

“So that’s how they do it. With a code that no one can read, they can hide anywhere,” Souen said, grinding his teeth.

“The reason Arahnia noticed is because the text is written in ink made from arachne-derived material. She was able to detect the trace amounts of pheromone included in the ink.”

“If it uses scent, wouldn’t anyone with a superior sense of smell notice?” Saki asked, but Glenn shook his head.

“Arahnia described it as a scent, but that’s not quite right. A pheromone is a substance that works on a living being to directly trigger some kind of instinct. Arachne just perceives it as a scent.”

“The Black Widows all looked human. How could they read it?”

“That...I don’t know.” Glenn shook his head again.

At least they now knew the method the Black Widows were using to keep from being caught.

“...This is a method my ma often uses.”

“Arahnia...”

“When I was a kid, this was how she directed her bandits. She extracted pheromones from her thread and used it to write text that humans can read if they use a special pair of glasses. That’s probably what the Black Widows do,” Arahnia said, distraught. “It’s all my ma’s fault...I’m so sorry, everyone.”

“So the Designer did have a connection to the Black Widows,” Souen stated.

Glenn had kept that fact from Souen, but apparently, he’d had his suspicions about it the whole time.

“Does this mean her mother is the leader?” Souen was livid.

“Nah, that’s impossible,” Arahnia brushed him off. “This is an old code. My ma wouldn’t keep using it. If she were involved, she’d be using a different code. And she’d never needlessly recycle a piece of evidence to write a criminal declaration. This was just the people she left behind being careless... In other words, we now know that the Black Widows are the leftovers of the bandit group my ma made.”

Everyone was silent.

Glenn couldn’t tell what feelings Arahnia was harboring about her mother and the Black Widows. But then, she continued.

“This is our chance.”

“What are you talking about?” Souen asked.

Arahnia laughed. “I can read this code. Actually, I can even write it.”

“You don’t mean...”

“Right. If we extract my pheromones, we can write the same code.

The Black Widows are collecting rare objects to offer to my ma, right? So I just need to pretend to be my ma and write a code to call the bastards out.”

Glenn was startled. Arahnia had cracked the Black Widows’ code. And she could lure them out. It wasn’t impossible but—

“It’s too dangerous,” he cried out. “We’ve already suffered arson. It may be possible to call on the Black Widows by using their code, but what will happen if we do? They may be capable of anything. We don’t even know if they’ll come to the same spot a second time...”

“Th-the bastards won’t get away this time!” Sioux said, completely worked up.

“As a doctor, I can’t overlook the danger. If we know the code, then we just need to search for people that have the same sort of paper and the glasses needed to read it.”

“They could just discard those. If they toss ’em while you’re busy searching every residence in the east, there’ll be no evidence left. And then you won’t be able to nab all the Black Widows, ya know? I guess I could walk around Heian trying to catch a whiff of the pheromones, but...”

Souen shook his head, his lips pursed. Heian was already in an uproar, having only just learned the truth about humans and monsters. Letting the people in town see Arahnia was even more dangerous.

But they also couldn’t summon the bandits to the village again...

“As long as we use the code, the bastards will come out as many times as they’re called. I’m sure my ma drilled that into them... You can tell because they’re still using her name.”

“I can’t let them get away with wreaking havoc on my land. We need to bring the bastards here and round up every last one of them,” Souen declared, fired up.

Glenn had a bad feeling about this. He understood Souen was angry about what they did to his village, but this was completely out of character. Saki’s injury was keeping him from thinking straight.

“Hey.” Aluloona suddenly broke her silence. “In that case, let us take care of capturing the Black Widows.”

“Aluloona... What do you mean?”

“The group is all men, right? We can catch them easily enough. Just lure them to the house my daughters and I are staying in. Our new flowers will be blooming soon.” Aluloona smiled.

It was true that Glenn’s treatment had only been a temporary measure. Until the simultaneous blooming period ended, new flowers would keep emerging, leading to an endless flow of pollen and nectar.

“Aluloona, I can’t ask a guest to do such a thing.”

“Hohoho, just who do you think I am? I may not look it, but I’m second in power only to Skadi. Do you understand what it means to wield that kind of power, as a monster? To be the second most powerful, after a dragon?” Aluloona bragged as she fluttered her fan.

Aluloona’s pollen was powerful against men, but Glenn had never heard anything about her being skilled in combat. That said, Souen had no way to contradict her claim to being Lindworm’s second-in-command. He might be a politician himself, but he didn’t have the authority.

“Aluloona, it’s too dangerous.” He couldn’t help but sound the alarm bells.

“Don’t worry, young doctor. I get the feeling that you think I’m nothing more than a sex maniac. Why don’t you let me show you another side of me?”

“Er...” Glenn couldn’t rebut her this time.

“What *you* need to do is pump some pheromones out of Arahnia. Nothing can be done without distributing the coded letter.”

“Ahh, ya...well, I...” For some reason, Arahnia turned her eyes away. Her face was red.

“Arahnia? What’s wrong?” Sapphee frowned.

“There’s not enough pheromones in my usual thread... There’s a specific process to get thread with a high-enough pheromone content...”

“You aren’t usually so evasive. Tell us.”

“The arachne pheromone...is made for seducing men and other living beings,” Arahnia muttered, looking at Glenn. “It’s thread that comes out when I’m...excited... So to extract it...”

“Wha—” Sapphee’s face went white. “What are you saying?!”

“W-well...the Doc is here, so it should be all right...” Arahnia put

her hands on her bright red cheeks.

Sapphee's tail was rattling, a sign that she was on alert. Glenn took a deep breath. The course of the conversation had changed drastically.

"My ma...she made the men in the bandit group fall in love with her so she could use them. She'd kiss them, and that would...excite her, so she could make pheromone-loaded thread. That's what she used for the code..."

"I see—and it's the same for you?"

"I think so... I mean, I've never tried."

Souen had prepared a room in one of the houses, telling Glenn to use it however he wanted. There was a futon laid out on the floor in the room. Saki had probably been trying to be helpful, but it looked like she'd set the scene for their wedding night, and Arahnia's bashfulness only enhanced the effect.

"So, then, let's kiss and make the thread with pheromones. Sapphee, we need your help."

"What about me, what about me, what about me?!"

"Sapphee..."

The shoji door was open slightly. They could see familiar lamia eyes peeking in and hear Sapphee muttering continuously.

Actually, Sapphee wasn't the only one peering in. When Aluloona heard there would be relations between a man and a woman, she'd decided to watch for her own entertainment. There was one more large shadow they could see through the shoji.

"Sapphee, calm down."

"How am I supposed to calm down?! Why does Arahnia get Dr. Glenn's first kiss?! I'm the first wife!"

"I'm more surprised that you haven't done it already."

"It's prohibited in Lindworm, and I couldn't after all this time! I had so many plans for when we got to the east, even using Aluloona's

sake to create the mood! Wait a second... Tisalia, does that mean you've... When?!"

"No, I haven't either. But if it's going to happen eventually anyway, what does the order matter?"

"Ahhh, even Tisalia is casual about it! I am the first wife!"

"Hey, this is a necessary procedure. Sapphee..." Glenn called out to the two through the shoji.

They were doing this to extract pheromones. It was a natural part of arachne biology for more pheromones to be produced when coming in contact with the opposite sex. And if someone had to excite Arahnia, there was no one more appropriate than Glenn, her fiancé.

"F-fine! It's just pheromone extraction, right? Then leave it to me, Sapphee, your pharmacist and first wife! You can always depend on me more than anyone else!"

Her emphasis on the whole first wife thing was rather excessive. Personally, Glenn didn't want to rank his wives—but Sapphee's anxiety about it was his own fault. Though he didn't want to make distinctions between his fiancées, he resolved to do something for Sapphee later.

"We have quite the audience," Arahnia said.

"I apologize. But we need someone to collect the thread."

"Heh, it's fine. Actually, it's kinda fun to think that I'm taking something Sapphee wants," Arahnia said, playing at being the villain.

They could hear the rattle of a snake tail. Glenn wondered why Arahnia was trying to pick a fight with Sapphee.

"Should we get started then, Doc?"

"Y-yes..."

Arahnia moved in toward Glenn. Apologizing to Sapphee in his heart the entire time, Glenn touched Arahnia's lips with his.

"Mmm..."

Arahnia wrapped two of her arms round Glenn's back and used the other two to hold his face in place. He was unable to move. Arahnia was in charge now.

"Heh. It looks like I get first pick..."

"Th-thanks..." Glenn didn't know how to react.

“You haven’t done this with Sapphee yet, right?”

“Uhh, well...I-I mean, I plan to.”

“Heh. Well, I guess we have to show her, huh?”

Arahnia glanced over at Sapphee’s eyes, peering at them through the shoji screen.

They kept kissing. Each time their lips touched, thread was discharged from the bottom part of Arahnia’s abdomen—the part that looked like a spider. The fairies pulled the end of the thread, delivering it to Sapphee, who was rotating the handle of a manual spool to collect it.

“Ahhh... This...is how you make good pheromone thread.”

“I-is that so?” Glenn didn’t really know a lot about it, but it seemed the kissing was effective.

“Mmm...” *Smack*. “Heh...mmm.”

Arahnia looked like she was enjoying herself. She kept glancing over at Sapphee. Sapphee kept wrapping the thread around the spool, but she stared intently at Glenn.

“E-ergh...”

“Mmm-hmm. That’s good. You can go even further, y’know.”

“Don’t instigate him, Aluloona! I won’t stand for it!” Sapphee yelled back.

Arahnia was one of his fiancées too. It wasn’t Sapphee’s place to decide if she stood for it or not—but as the self-assigned first wife, she probably felt it was.

What is going on?

Glenn’s lips were locked with Arahnia’s. He could feel his head getting fuzzy. It reminded him of how Aluloona’s pollen and Plum’s bloodsucking felt...

“Mm, erg, mmm...”

“A-Arahnia?!”

Just then—

Arahnia took out a sake bottle that she had hidden in her kimono. She guzzled it down as if she were gulping water.

“Heh heh...it’s delicious.”

“W-wait, that’s not Aluloona’s sake, is it?”

“Yep. I’ve been drinking it.”

“B-but when?”

So it hadn’t all been stolen. And it was why he felt faint. Arahnia was drinking the sake and transferring the alcohol to Glenn by mouth.

She moved her red face close to Glenn’s, completely ignoring his protest. Sake dripped from her mouth and onto her bare chest. “Heh, what’s the problem? It excites me...and I can’t do something this embarrassing while sober.”

“Wait, but—”

“Mmm.” Arahnia wasn’t interested in listening to Glenn’s words. She pulled his face to hers, and he felt sake flow from her mouth into his.

“Mmm, mmggu...”

“Heh, tastes good, yeah? How does it feel to drink sake from your fiancé’s mouth?”

“I...it’s a little strong for me...” Glenn moaned. He almost never imbibed, so this was a bit intense for him. A little sake seeped out from his mouth.

“Arrrgh. I should have done that. Why didn’t I think of it?!” Sapphee lamented.

What was she talking about? Glenn had visions of her making him drink and drink, with no care for his limits.

There was one other thing that worried him. “Um, Arahnia?”

“Hmm? What?”

“Is this...your first kiss too, Arahnia?”

“Mmm?! Wha, er, uhh?!” Arahnia squirmed at Glenn’s question. She spit out the sake that was left in her mouth. “Well, uh...yeah, it’s my first.”

“Wait a second. But Aluloona, what about when she stole your lover?”

“That was just her predatory habits at play. Arahnia is a genuine virgin. She’s never even kissed anyone—it’s surprising she gives off such

an experienced impression.”

“You in the bleachers! Would you mind shutting up?” Arahnia screamed toward the whispers behind the shoji. Her face was bright red—maybe from the sake, or maybe because the truth of her virginity had been exposed.

Still, she kept producing thread, as if prompted by those emotions. The fairies were hard at work collecting it, and Sapphee continued to spool it through the gap in the shoji.

“Ya know...I thought since it was your first time, I should take the lead, Doc...”

“Strange, I got the feeling you were coming on to me in the harpy village before...”

“D-don’t mention that! Oh, my god...how embarrassing!”

Glenn had brought up something from back in Arahnia’s predatory days. She covered her face, clearly embarrassed by her past. She was a completely different person now from the one he’d first met back in the harpy village.

He was glad his impression of her changed.

“Um, Arahnia. There doesn’t really need to be someone leading—”

“I need it! It’s a mental thing!”

Arahnia’s four arms were trembling and she had tears in her eyes. She looked exactly like Sapphee when she was sulking. Maybe they had these little similarities because they were best friends.

“I see. So it’s about setting a mood...”

Glenn thought to himself. They were performing this procedure in order to extract arachne pheromone. Though he wasn’t treating an ailment, he tended to interpret problems through a medical lens, and to take a medical approach to solving them.

In that case, perhaps she should have been the one to take the initiative?

“Arahnia, can I speak to you for a minute?” Glenn held out his hand and took the sake bottle from Arahnia. He took a swig.

“Oh, you’re ready to drink, Doc? If you would have just told me—mmm?!” Arahnia opened her eyes wide.

“Mmm-aaah?!” Sapphee let out a screech that no one had ever heard from her before.

Glenn had taken Arahnia’s lips in his, his mouth still full of sake.

“Mmm?! Mm?! Ahh...mmm!”

Arahnia was resisting, her lips still locked with Glenn’s. Glenn didn’t know why she was struggling, but he remained calm and wrapped his tongue around hers, pushing past it to pass the sake from his mouth into Arahnia’s. The process was basically the same as when he gave Lulala mouth-to-mouth artificial respiration in the water. It was passing the liquid in his own mouth along to someone else.

“Mm! Mmm...mmm...argh... ahh...!”

Unlike the underwater process, Glenn didn’t have to hold his breath, so it was much easier for him to use his tongue this time.



He closed his lips over hers and wrapped their tongues together, careful not to get in the way of her breathing.

Of course, from Glenn's perspective, he was only kissing her to extract her pheromone. But to the naked eye, what they were doing could only be interpreted as a sexual act between fiancées.

"Mmbbaah... Doc!" Arahnia pulled her mouth away from him in resistance. Despite the intense kissing, not a single drop of sake dripped from her mouth. "What are you doing?! I thought this was your first kiss, Doc! N-no one said that you knew how to use your tongue like that! Where and from whom did you learn that?!"

For some reason, she was really interrogating him. It was rare for Arahnia to act so openly jealous, and in a way, it made Glenn happy to know she was that infatuated with him.

"It's not his first kiss?! That's news to me too!" Sapphee shrieked.

"Settle down," Aluloona said.

There was a commotion on the other side of the shoji screen.

"No, um...this is my first kiss."

"Really? It doesn't seem like it."

"But artificial respiration was hammered into me at the Academy...I had to practice on others," Glenn said, recalling his experience.

To make a long story short, he'd taken Cthulhy's class on artificial respiration. Thanks to technology developed by the cyclopes, they now had dolls that could be used to practice artificial respiration. But that hadn't been the case when he was at the Academy, forcing him to practice on live subjects.

"Huh...so in other words, your first was...Cthulhy, Doc?"

"No, that was really just a class. There was nothing romantic about it...and besides, Sapphee took the same class."

"Ahh, we did have that class!" Sapphee spun around, looking annoyed.

Cthulhy had trained every student in her class how to perform artificial respiration. No exceptions. That was the only way, back when there were so few study materials available.

"The lives of many have been saved by artificial respiration,

thanks to that class.”

“It’s just treatment, not a kiss—mm,” Arahnia began, but Glenn stopped her, covering her lips.

He estimated they only had a small quantity of the pheromone. They would need a lot more if they were going to use it to write out coded messages. Sapphee was still wrapping thread around the spool, but he didn’t think it was enough.

“Mmmm, D-Doc...oww...mmm!”

“I’m sorry, I want to get a bit more thread.”

“You always get so forceful...mmm!” Arahnia squirmed, trying to resist.

Glenn thrust his tongue deeper, attempting to excite her as much as possible. Every time he wrapped his tongue around hers, large amounts of thread were produced.

“Mmm...mmm... Aaagh...”

He could see Arahnia’s eyes were glazing over. He couldn’t tell if it was from his kissing, or from the sake. They had both consumed quite a bit already, so it would make sense that they would be inebriated by now.

I think...I drank too much.

If he were to be honest, Glenn couldn’t do this sober either. It was because of the sake that he was able to act so boldly.

“Mmmp...ahh...mmmhhmm...”

More and more thread was produced as Glenn explored Arahnia’s mouth with his tongue, accurately determining which spots produced the most thread and made her seem the happiest.

“Mmm, mmm, bfaa!” Arahnia pulled her mouth away again. A string of saliva connected their mouths. “Doc...I...I’m so embarrassed.”

“Arahnia,” Glenn whispered in her ear.

“Aggh... Th-that tickles...”

“Arahnia. It’s all right,” Glenn said. His head was fuzzy and spinning from the sake. Perhaps that was why he was able to utter words that he never would have thought of under normal circumstances. “It’s all right. I love you, and so does Sapphee.”

“D-Doc?”

“I don’t want you to say that you’re fine being a mistress... Don’t think you should keep your distance in case something happens, or that you don’t need me to like you... No matter what happens, I’m here for you,” Glenn told her.

Arahnia just listened to him, dumbfounded by a combination of alcohol and humiliation.

She listened to Glenn’s words and couldn’t come up with her own.

Glenn could see right through her. He knew she was trying to keep their relationship casual. He knew she was continually prioritizing Sapphee and Tisalia, making sure that he didn’t care about her any more than necessary.

She’d always thought this day would come—when she’d hurt someone she loved because of her bandit mother. She thought it best to stay a mistress and separate herself from Glenn and Sapphee, so she wouldn’t cause them any future trouble.

But—

Glenn not only saw right through that—he declared that he would always be by her side. He never wanted them to be separated again, like what happened with Sapphee before.

“Ugh...” Arahnia held Glenn tight.

She’d been so sure he would never notice. She’d thought, based on how he behaved, that Sapphee would always come first for him—but she’d been happy with that. She loved Sapphee anyway.

But, Arahnia thought to herself, the fact that she wasn’t *completely* immune to jealousy was a testament to how much she truly loved Glenn. And it couldn’t be helped.

“You’re hopeless.”

Arahnia decided right then and there that she would never let him go. No matter what happened, they would be together, as if bound to each other by a spider’s web.

“Okay, okay, okay!” Sapphee opened the shoji door. She jumped in between Glenn and Arahnia, not willing to let them continue for even one second more than necessary. “We have plenty of thread. That’s enough! All done, the end!”

She threw her arms around Glenn, her jealousy on full display. Arahnia laughed inside. She knew that Glenn loved Sapphee the most, no matter what she did, and it was adorable that Sapphee couldn't contain her jealousy, despite that.

This is how we should be.

Arahnia thought they could be happy forever, if they just stayed like this.

"Huh?"

"Doc fell asleep."

The sake must have been too strong for him, because Glenn was snoring in Sapphee's arms. It was only to be expected after consuming that much alcohol, since he didn't normally drink.

"I'm...a little tired too." Arahnia was lightheaded.

"Hey, Arahnia—are you okay?"

"Fine, fine." She laughed, but she was unsteady. Sapphee narrowed her eyes.

"What did the Doctor say to you?"

"Er."

"I knew it. Ugh, unbelievable. He's never said anything important to me." Sapphee wrapped her tail around Glenn, lifting him. She laid him on the futon.

"No, I mean, er..."

"Oh, my. You're flustered, Arahnia." Tisalia laughed, having stuck her head out from the shoji to see what was happening.

It was useless. Arahnia would no longer be able to hide anything from these two women—the women who loved the same man as her.

In the past, it had always been Arahnia who smoothed everything over. But she wouldn't be able to do that anymore.

"Ugh, I hate this..." Surrendering, Arahnia covered her bright red face.

Sapphee and Tisalia watched her, amused.

They were able to extract pheromones from Arahnia's thread without issue. Souen distributed ads with Arahnia's code written on them throughout the capital of Heian. On the surface, the ads looked like a large-scale advertisement for Aluloona's sake, but they actually held a message to the Black Widows.

The message was that the "Arachnida" they served was in the monster village. The Black Widows were to ready themselves and all make their way to that monster village. As the bandits had no central base, being spread all through Heian, this should be enough to make them all congregate on Souen's land. Souen took over all preparations, pulling what strings he needed to.

Glenn, for his part, simply waited patiently for the day the Black Widows would come.

And then—

Once, there was a poor drayman in the human realm. His father had been a drayman before him, and his father's father, and *his* father before him. The man assumed he would also live and die the dull life of a drayman.

But—

One day, he met a beautiful woman who seemed like she'd walked out of a fairytale. The woman, who by the name Arachnida, showered him with boundless love. The bottom half of her body was...well, she was what they called a weaver in the east. But Arachnida was so spellbinding that the man's aversion to this was short-lived.

Who cared if she was half spider, or a monster? The more he got to know her, the more he found her just as beautiful as any human—nay, even *more* beautiful. Being with her made him happier than he'd ever been before. He left his village and devoted his life to Arachnida, giving her everything she desired—even if he had to steal to obtain it. In accordance with Arachnida's wishes, he formed a group of thieves who procured everything she desired, even using violence when the situation called for it. It was all for Arachnida.

Eventually, the man became the leader of the Black Widows. He

gave everything he had to Arachnida. He did everything she asked, bloodying his own hands in the process. He left his home and his family for her. He could no longer even remember the name of his hometown.

But his love was entirely unrequited. Arachnida partnered freely with other people to sate her lustful desires, and though the man forced himself to tolerate this for many years, one day he could no longer hold back. Criticizing Arachnida for her debauchery, he told her that he wanted her love all for his own.

Arachnida disappeared, leaving the Black Widows behind, the very day after the man reproached her.

I need to get Arachnida back.

He was forever her slave.

This time, he wouldn't let her get away. He'd cut off her limbs if he had to, to make sure she couldn't run. He was sure he could make her stay by his side. The other members of the Black Widows, who adored Arachnida just as much as he did, had no inkling of the dark thoughts their leader harbored. The only reason they'd become bandits was because they believed the woman they loved would return someday.

"Captain," called his second-in-command, a lit torch in his hand. "Is Arachnida really in this village? We got the coded letter, but..."

"I'm sure of it. Arachnida is the only one who can make this ink and coded message," the man said.

The tinted glasses resting on the bridge of his nose contained special polarized lenses that allowed him to read the message written made from the pheromone ink. He'd also used them to get past the arachne traps set in the monster village.

"It was stupid of me. I knew the traps were arachne...but I never thought Arachnida herself might have set them. Now we can finally bring our queen home."

"Understood." The man saluted his leader obediently. Smitten by Arachnida, these men were easy to control.

The Black Widows had surrounded one of the houses in the monster village. Inside that house lay Arachnida, who'd send them a coded message in pheromone ink to summon them here. *Thank you for everything you've done for me*, the message had read. *I watched what you*

did in the village. Because of everything you've done for me since I went away, I've chosen to dedicate myself to you once again. Come get me in the monster village.

The rest of the Widows implicitly believed the message was true. Only the leader smelled something fishy. This was the crafty Arachnida they were talking about. She might have something else in mind.

But there were so many of them, hiding in the woods. No matter what the monster woman had planned, there was only so much she could do. Arachnida was cunning and unmerciful, but when it came to brute force, she was vulnerable. That was why she seduced men into doing her dirty work for her.

Arachnida, you'll finally be all mine.

The leader of the Black Widows lifted his arm, the signal to strike.

“Unh...”

They entered the house.

The leader and the men who followed him moved swiftly through the dark, like ninjas. They had trained and acquired these skills in order to steal the things Arachnida loved.

There are no traps...

Arachne loved traps. But there wasn't a single thread to be seen anywhere. He wondered if she really wanted them to come get her.

What he *did* see, ahead of them in the dark house, was—

“We've been waiting for you.”

A flower.

“Thank goodness you're all hot-blooded men. You did well. Teehee.”

Before them stood a large bulb crowned with red flowers. In the midst of the flowers stood a woman with green skin.

“Wh—who are you? A flower fairy?”

“Idiots. It's a monster from the west. An alraune,” the leader told his comrades.

Most humans from the east had never seen monsters before. Even most of the Black Widows had only ever seen an arachne. The alraune fluttered her leaves, laughing at them.

“We were tricked?”

“It’s too bad. Well, I don’t feel bad for fooling heretics like you—but I do recommend you go peacefully.”

“Tsk.” The leader clicked his tongue.

There was nothing to fear. A single alraune woman posed no threat to them. Every single member of the Black Widows was enamored of Arachnida. No matter how beautiful this monster before them might be, they would resist her charms.

“Ignore her! Kill her! It’s just a monster flower.”

“Good grief.”

Her vines flew at the men, who cut them away. But there was no sign of the alraune recoiling.

“Seriously? I mean, it’s not like I don’t like it rough.”

“Kill it! Cut it down and put it in a pot. Arachnida will love it!”

“You won’t get off that easy.”

Her vines stretched like whips, wrapping around the men’s necks. The leader nonchalantly sliced through those vines, too...and then it happened.

“E-eee!”

A scream cut through the air.

One after another, the shoji screens in the house exploded as a seemingly endless tangle of vines burst through them. The vines grew in from all sides of the room, stretching out to capture the Black Widows.

“What in the world?!”

“Captain! It’s a huge group of alraune!”

“What did you say?!” The man was dumbstruck.

The women came from every direction—all the same species, all sharing the same face—and began to ensnare the men. Their vines were nothing more than plant matter, but if they bound them up securely enough, they’d have no way to escape.

Where had they all been hiding?!

“Mother, I’m tired.”

“I was already tired waiting for these guys, buried in the dirt.”

"I'd rather be buried in a man's chest."

"But there are so many of them."

"Do you think we can?"

"I think *they're* going to be buried...by us."

"Well, that's fine."

The army of alraune chattered and giggled together. Their faces looked so similar that the leader couldn't tell them apart. The only difference he could see was the color of the flowers on their heads.

"Don't be afraid. Just set them on fire! Burn this house down!" the leader ordered his second-in-command.

But before he could act, another vine wrapped around his torch. There was a whiff of burnt matter for just a second, and then the flame went out, followed by a strange slurping sound in the darkness.

"Despicable. Don't you know how hard it is for live trees to burn? We're just full of moisture. Ridiculous to think you could hurt us with a few torches," an alraune said savagely.

The men felt eyes on them, as if they were being appraised.

"Hehehe. A man, a man."

"Is he good-looking?"

"Nope."

"Not at all."

"Dr. Glenn is much better looking."

"He's pathetic, compared to Souen."

"Who cares about his face?"

"As long as he has an able body."

"As long as he's fit from the waist down."

"That's enough to satisfy us."

Voices echoed through the air as the alraune eyed them through the darkness. The men felt like insects caught by carnivorous plants.

"I-I've heard of this..." the man next to the leader spoke up, his voice shaking. "Alraune are... living flowers that suck the blood of criminals! They suck all the fluids from your body, making their flowers bloom bright red... We're all going to die!"

“Don’t panic! They’re just plant monsters! They’ll die if you stab them!”

“That’s true enough. Not that we’re going to give you the chance to use your blades, of course.”

The second the leader called out, more vines flew toward him. Before he had a chance to cut them away, his blade was snatched from him by vines stretching in all directions.

It’s no use. We’re no match for them...

The unarmed men were surrounded by the alraune.

“Mother.”

“C’mon, Mother.”

“Haven’t we waited long enough?”

“We can eat them, right?”

“These are the bastards who terrorized the villagers. We can crush them, right?”

“Come now, just wait a second. There’s a proper way to do these things.”

That was when the leader finally realized...they never stood a chance. These alraune thought of them as nothing but food.

“We alraune are in the middle of a mass blooming. We received treatment, but it was only temporary relief, not a cure. Our desire is bottomless. It really is such a burden to bear...”

“Uh, ah...”

“But as long as we have men, we can be satisfied. I was planning to let you go if you surrendered, but there’s nothing I can do now that you’ve resisted. We won’t be showing any mercy today. All evil will be crushed. Don’t go down too easily, hmm?”

Screams echoed through the room.

The Black Widows behind the leader were rushed by the alraune. There was a chorus of screams—screams of terror from the men, and pleasure from the women. Next came squishing, slurping, sexual sounds.

Even if it was with monsters, these men were getting laid. However, there was no joy in their voices—which was only to be

expected, of course. They were merely being used like sex dolls.

“Ahh, don’t expect sweet love-making. I told you there would be no mercy. None of you are leaving here until we’ve squeezed every last drop from you, you hear?”

One after another, the alraune crowded around the Black Widows until even the leader disappeared into the sea of flowers and leaves and women’s bodies. The alraune were fighting tooth and nail for a taste of man.

“Ah, m-my love, my Black Widows...a-ahh... M-my Arachnida...”

The leader’s last words were the name of the woman he loved. He’d wanted her so bad, he was willing to hurt her, and now he was pathetically calling out for her to save him.

But the woman he yearned for enough to commit crimes in her name couldn’t hear him. The only ones who could hear him were the alraune women—lust personified, ready to devour him. There was no love or passion here, merely unrequited lust.

The leader of the Black Widows was swallowed up by that torrent of desire, completely helpless to resist.

“Ah, ah, ahhh...”

He succumbed to the utter humiliation of being used, losing consciousness under the onslaught of pleasure. The concentrated fragrance of the nectar robbed him of his ability to think, and eventually, he stopped trying to.

“Hey, girls, I gave you the men, but leave some for me. And don’t kill them. I promised Souen.”

The agreement was that they would be kept alive and handed over to Souen—and as long as they were alive, it didn’t matter *how* alive they were.

Aluloona smiled at the orgy before her, clearly pleased her daughters were enjoying themselves.

“I didn’t plan for this to happen, but what a great gift to give my daughters.” The second-most powerful member of the Lindworm City Council chuckled to herself in satisfaction. “It looks like I’ll have granddaughters to look forward to soon.”

And with that, Aluloona joined the fun.

The joyful sound of women's voices wafted from the house. Every once in a while, a man's cry of agony could be heard as his vital fluids were squeezed from him—but Souen could care less about their suffering.

“Are they having an orgy about now?”

“Well, I would imagine so.”

“Do you want to join, Souen?” Saki asked teasingly next to him.

“Don't ask such a weird question. I have no time to be infatuated with another woman,” Souen answered honestly, making Saki giggle.

“They didn't need our assistance at all, in the end.”

The alraune filled the house they'd lured the Black Widows to, having their way with the culprits. You might think the men wouldn't be too opposed to this, but the alraune were being *merciless*. Imagining the men being drained of their blood once they'd been drained of semen disgusted Souen, but he did consider it the perfect punishment for such criminals.

“Argh.”

Eventually, a member of the Black Widows crawled from the house, his clothes shredded and his entire body covered in nectar. He must have found an opportunity to escape.

“Hmph!”

Souen hit him with a tranquilizer dart he'd had hidden in his sleeve. The man passed out immediately, and Souen produced a rope, beginning to tie him up.

“So they will run if they can. It's impossible to keep people from running, even in this state.”

The alraune girls were blind to anything except their own pleasure right now. Souen and Saki had been keeping watch outside the house, just in case one of the bandits managed to slip through the cracks.

“That's wonderful, Souen. When did you learn how to use darts?”

“It's just for self-defense. We can't take blades or other obvious weapons into political situations.”

“How terrifying,” Saki said, striking a Black Widow bandit who

ran out of the house with the hilt of her sword. The sound this produced made Souen slightly concerned she'd broken his neck.

"I'm nothing compared to you."

"My goal is to be a virtuous and adorable wife who can protect my husband," Saki said, cracking her neck.

Souen wondered precisely what was virtuous, or even adorable, about this woman who'd moaned wildly in front of her lover's brother just to prove a point...but he held his tongue. For now, he wanted to keep her herculean strength focused on the criminals.

"There must be many more in the mountains—"

"Yeah. I've ordered Sioux and the guards to hunt them down. They took the demons who live in the village along too, so they should be able to round them all up. The mermaid diva cut the ropes mooring all the boats the bastards came in on. They're not leaving this island."

Souen chuckled.

He was the one who devised this plan to lure in the Black Widows, using the people at his disposal. Barring any unforeseen complications, things should go smoothly.

"It's a wonderful plan."

"This village is our home, and the centaur princess is our guest. Still, to think all these people are willing to come together to help Glenn... It's incredible."

"He must be popular with people, unlike someone I know."

"I wonder who that could be?" Souen laughed.

"I see you pretending to be so innocent."

"I have never pretended to be innocent in my entire life."

"Nothing but lies... Why not be honest? You're angry that the Black Widows got the better of you."

"Of course I am. This is my village. I have to protect it. How much money and time have I spent to turn this into a place where monsters can live in peace?"

"That's not what I mean." Saki smiled. "Why don't you admit it's because I was burned, and because the people of the village were frightened, that made you angry?"

Souen was stunned. Saki could see right through him.

“That’s not—”

“Yes?” Saki cracked a joint in her arm. Souen’s face grew stiff, concerned that she might try another way of coercing him.

“Well, it’s not completely irrelevant.”

“Ugh, you never can just admit defeat.”

“Shut up.” Souen stepped on one of the freshly captured Black Widows.

The wild voices of the alraune continued to sound from the house they were watching.

Interlude: We Greet Again

“I HEARD YOU CAPTURED the Black Widows.”

“Yes.”

Glenn was back at the Litbeit mansion and speaking to his father, Vaclav. Even though they had been in the east for over a month, this was only his second time seeing his father, the first being the day they arrived.

“That’s why I’ve returned to ask for your blessing once again. Please, agree to my marriage with Arahnia.”

Sapphee, Tisalia, and Arahnia were all there with him. Glenn bowed his head deeply, as was customary in the east. Arahnia also bowed her head gracefully.

He still felt uncomfortable around his father, but he was no longer afraid. He had already resolved not to return to Lindworm until his father approved of all his marriages.

“I’ve heard most of the story.” Vaclav’s expression did not change. “I also heard about your efforts from Souen. You did well. To think that my children were able to capture the bandits that were terrorizing the city...even the emperor is pleased. Apparently, Souen will soon be hearing directly from the emperor.”

“I don’t deserve such praise, Father,” Souen said, bowing his head nonchalantly.

Having the highest authority in the human realm learn his name—he was clearly and shamelessly trying to use it to gain political influence.

“The monster village has also been the talk of Heian. Souen and his...Saki, is it? I’m sure they will be able to marry sooner rather than later.”

“So then—”

“Be that as it may.” Vaclav remained stern. “The impression the Black Widows left on the people of the city has not changed. They

haven't forgotten the name Arachnida. And so, to allow such a marriage so soon—"

"We're not going to be married here. Even if the gossip continues for a while, the subjects of that gossip—the Black Widows—are gone. The rumors will soon cease. No one will care enough to gossip about the wife of your doctor son, who lives far away in Lindworm," Glenn rebutted fearlessly.

He had logic on his side. Vaclav was concerned about the reputation of the Litbeits in Heian; as a successful businessman, he had to worry about his image. But he was also a reasonable man. Glenn was sure that if he explained his true feelings, he would come around.

As expected, Vaclav's face was grim. But he didn't argue. What Glenn said made sense.

"I also request this of you, Father."

"Sioux too!"

Souen and Sioux offered their support.

"Both of you?"

"It was thanks to Arahnia that we were able to capture the Black Widows. A union with such an intelligent woman would be an asset to the Litbeit family."

"She is a very nice woman who takes good care of Glenn, Father. Please!"

Glenn was grateful for the support from his brother and sister. But Vaclav's expression didn't change a bit. He waited, but his father said nothing.

Could it all have been in vain?

"Guren? Are you here?"

The voice was familiar. The door to the next room opened ever so slightly, and a small figure peered out.

"Mother."

"You travel all the way back here and don't even come see your mother?" she said in a scolding tone.

Glenn felt a lump in his throat. The whole purpose of his trip was to tell his parents of his engagement to Sapphee and the others. But he

needed Vaclav's blessing first and therefore had never made it to the point of introducing them to his mother. Souen had even arranged it so that they wouldn't end up meeting.

"Hey, go back to sleep, Kokuha. Don't you still have a fever?"

"I'm feeling much better," she snapped back in a way that even Vaclav couldn't respond to. "I heard you were staying on Souen's island. Why didn't you come see your mother?"

"I-I'm sorry. I wanted to introduce you to my fiancées today—but Father won't give his blessing."

"Marriage. You mean Sapphee, then? And she's right there."

His mother kept herself hidden in the adjacent room. It seemed like she was stifling laughter. How did she know Sapphee was there? Maybe she was just assuming that if Glenn were to marry anyone, it would naturally be Sapphee.

"It's been a long time, Lady Kokuha."

"It's fine. I'm relieved to hear it's Sapphee. I will admit your snake body was strange to me at first...but you're a nice, good-natured girl. Please take care of my Guren."

"Yes, um...of course I will." Sapphee bowed her head deeply. "But Lady Kokuha...I'm not the only one."

She went on to tell Glenn's mother about the other two fiancées, Tisalia and Arahnia. She also included the fact that Vaclav wouldn't approve of a marriage with Arahnia.

Kokuha fell silent for a while after listening to Sapphee's fluent explanation.

"Dear," his mother said, addressing Vaclav in a powerful voice that turned their blood to ice.

"Umm..."

"Did you really say such a thing to Guren's fiancée, after she came all the way from the west? That you wouldn't approve their marriage?"

"But, darling... Guren brought three candidates home at once—"

"What does that have to do with anything? Souen, Guren, Suiu—none of our children are completely normal! So, he brought home three wives. What of it? If we let this chance pass by, no one will marry Guren."

That was a harsh way to put it, but...Glenn couldn't deny it in front of Sapphee, who was stifling her giggles.

"Sioux has grown demon horns, Souen is saying he wants to marry another demon. What are you afraid will happen if Guren marries three monsters?"

"No—I'm just concerned for the credibility of the Litbeit—"

"Isn't Souen the future head of the family? What does he think of it?" Their mother's assault was relentless.

Souen was also stifling laughter after being dragged into the conversation. "Mother. I have approved of this marriage from the beginning...I want my brother to be happy," he said brazenly.

"See? Now, the matter is closed."

"Er...yes..."

Vaclav looked awkward. No matter how storied the history of the Litbeit family's merchant business might be, the head of the family couldn't win an argument with his wife.

"I'm going to rest. Please come by and let me see your face later, Guren."

"Y-yes, Mother..."

"I also expect you to explain why you didn't write a single letter."

"Yes, well—umm...sorry..."

He didn't know what to say.

When he apologized, his mother laughed in a ladylike manner, closing the door behind her. In the end, they hadn't even caught a glimpse of her face.

Glenn tried to remember when he last heard her voice. He'd always thought his mother was just as disappointed in him as his father had been, but her voice just now had sounded exactly the same as it did before he left home for the Academy and inconsiderately neglected to visit or even write to his parents for years.

The fact made him truly, genuinely happy.

"Did you hear that?" Vaclav's stern expression shifted for the first time. He shrugged his shoulders, as if unsure what kind of expression to assume in its place. "The true head of the Litbeit family has spoken, and

we shall all obey.”

“Father...” Souen chuckled uneasily.

Evidently, a husband couldn't defy his wife. Judging by the relationship between Souen and Saki, the Litbeit household would not be breaking with tradition in this regard.

What about Glenn, though? Sapphee stared at him, grinning. He couldn't imagine himself winning an argument against her.

“Kokuha hasn't been well lately.”

“Yes...”

“The doctor said it's anxiety. She doesn't look that bad, but ever since Suiu's Demonitis diagnosis, she's been in some emotional turmoil. Her fever comes and goes.”

Glenn had had no idea. Souen and Sioux wore meek expressions, so they'd clearly known for some time. He felt guilty about his lack of filial piety.

“But Suiu is doing well, and now that Kokuha's seen Glenn, her anxiety will surely abate.”

“Yes. That's good to hear.” Glenn resolved in his mind to write regularly from now on.

Even Arahnia had a gentle smile on her face. He didn't think he'd need to worry about her saying she was content to be a mistress again.

“Congratulations again, Guren. Make sure to get along with your wives.”

“Yes, Father.”

Glenn bowed his head to his father. Vaclav's stern face had softened, and the corners of his mouth looked to be turning up. After running away from home to become a monster doctor, and for all intents and purposes cutting off contact with his family, Glenn finally felt like they were reconciled.

“Sapphee. Tisalia, Arahnia. I am sure my shameless son will be a handful, but please take care of him.”

“Of course. Please leave the doctor to me,” Sapphee said with a prim expression.

This was a turning point, Glenn thought. In this one trip, he'd

introduced his fiancées to his parents and made peace with his guilt for running away from home. At the same time, receiving his father's blessing to marry his fiancées made him feel as if he had finally earned his independence. Now he could righteously follow his path as a doctor.

“I will continue to work diligently in Lindworm,” Glenn declared. Vaclav nodded to him tolerantly.

Epilogue: Flowers Bloom in Spring

THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS were in full bloom in Souen's village. It had still been plum blossom season when they arrived in the east, but the weather was warm this year, and the cherry blossoms bloomed earlier than usual.

Perhaps they'd even come to bid farewell to Glenn before he went back to Lindworm.

"Everyone, thank you for everything," said Saki, who had come to see them off. Souen was standing next to her, arms crossed, looking important. "It was thanks to all of you that we were able to capture the Black Widows and help reduce prejudice against monsters in the east. Thank you very much."

Saki's expression was bright. Ever since the Black Widows incident, the council of statesmen had begun discussing whether those with Demonitis should be granted the same rights as humans. Naturally, Souen was the one leading those discussions. It was thanks to monsters that the Black Widows, who had been terrorizing the capital, were captured. It was thanks to Souen's village. Their reputation was fast gaining traction in Heian.

They had proven that those who were ostracized for their horns—even demons like Saki—were no different from humans. It felt like they would be able to live as equals someday.

That would be the day Souen and Saki could marry and live as husband and wife.

"It's not like Brother Souen to splurge for a boat like this!" Sioux declared from where she stood next to Glenn, looking pleased.

At the port on Souen's hidden island was the newest model cargo vessel. Their trip back home would be comfortable, to say the least. As people in the shipping business, the Litbeits made it a point to procure good boats.

"What? The alraune sake did very well. I wanted to show my gratitude."

“There you go again. Look at your little brother and tell him directly that you are grateful.”

“I will do no such thing. I don’t know when he’ll be unfaithful with you again. Glenn, just go home.”

“I wasn’t unfaithful!” Glenn reacted to the accusation without thinking.

Without a word, Saki gave Souen a jab in his stomach for the rude comment. Souen let out a strange grunt.

“Nooo, I don’t wanna gooo. I wanna play with the eastern boys!”

“The Draconess ordered me to bring you back, Aluloona. Don’t be difficult.”

“I haven’t been able to play at all!”

“That’s a selfish thing for the second most powerful person on the city council to say.”

Glenn turned around to see a massive bulb being dragged toward them. Aluloona was whining, continually trying to plant her vines in the ground, but apparently, she was no match for Kunai’s strength.

“C’mon, Mother.”

“You’re acting like a child.”

“Well, she is like a child.”

“That’s true.”

“She probably can’t even tell us apart.”

“We’re the result of her irresponsible sexcapades, after all.”

“I wish she would at least learn our names.”

Her daughters were giggling at her expense. Aluloona continued to resist, but Kunai dragged her onto the boat.

“Kunai, the council of statesmen are rushing the survey of the items collected by the Black Widows. However, they haven’t found any blueprints for creating an undead human yet.”

“I see,” Kunai responded casually. “Well, it was just a rumor anyway. It can’t be helped.”

“It seems they have more stashes where they kept stolen goods. If we find it, I will contact you.”

“Yeah. Thank you very much,” Kunai said, dragging Aluloona the rest of the way onto the boat.

Souen stared at the scene before him as if unsure how to describe it.

“The authorities and their attendants in Lindworm...are all like that, huh? Free to be themselves.”

“Uhh...well, yeah.” Glenn struggled to respond. Well, Aluloona might be behaving this way now, but she was still capable of working hard.

“There’s still so much I don’t understand...but it must be a good place for you and Sioux. Be well, Glenn.”

“Yeah. You too, Brother.” Glenn laughed.

He still had his qualms about his brother, but Souen had really helped Glenn on this trip. Even if he didn’t trust him, Glenn could trust Saki, and trust that Souen would obey her. As long as Saki was around, he was sure his older brother would be okay.

“Make sure to write.”

“I know...”

Glenn didn’t want to make his parents worry anymore. He promised himself he would buy stationery as soon as he arrived in Lindworm.

“Arahnia, are you going?”

“Yeah, I am. You be good, Tsumu.”

“Uh-huh. Arahnia, be happy with the doctor.”

The small arachne said her goodbyes in a shaky voice. Arahnia gave her a pat on the head, and Tsumugi giggled, as if it tickled. Arahnia kept going, saying goodbye to the monsters she got to know in the village.

Now, then.

She watched Tsumugi walk away, then glanced at Glenn and Sioux, who were still busy saying their farewells to their brother and

Saki.

What am I going to do with this?

Arahnia took out a single sheet of paper that she wanted to get rid of before boarding the boat. It was an advertisement for alraune sake, including a depiction of Kunai, that had been distributed throughout the east—what they'd used to lure in the Black Widows. Written in pheromone ink excreted by Arahnia was the false claim that her mother was in the monster village.

Or it was supposed to be, anyway.

This is...different.

It was the advertisement that Souen spread through the capital. But there was a message in another pheromone written over Arahnia's, the difference so subtle that only an arachne would notice. This piece of paper had showed up one day in the house she was staying in—an act so skillful that it made Arahnia feel uneasy.

It's her smell. My ma's.

Arahnia cursed her mother, thoroughly annoyed.

The message, written in pheromone ink, was only a few lines long. *"You've become a lovely woman, Arahnia. If you want to become a bandit, come back anytime."*

The irresponsible words disgusted Arahnia.

So she was watching the entire time.

Arahnia didn't know how she did it, but her mother knew everything—what the Black Widows were doing, the fact that Arahnia was in the east. She even knew that Arahnia had used her pheromones to entrap the Black Widows. That meant she was near Heian. And she had been watching Arahnia the entire time.

Naturally, Arahnia couldn't just shrug off a message like this. She had no idea when her elusive mother might just decide to show up again, or cause trouble for Glenn.

But...

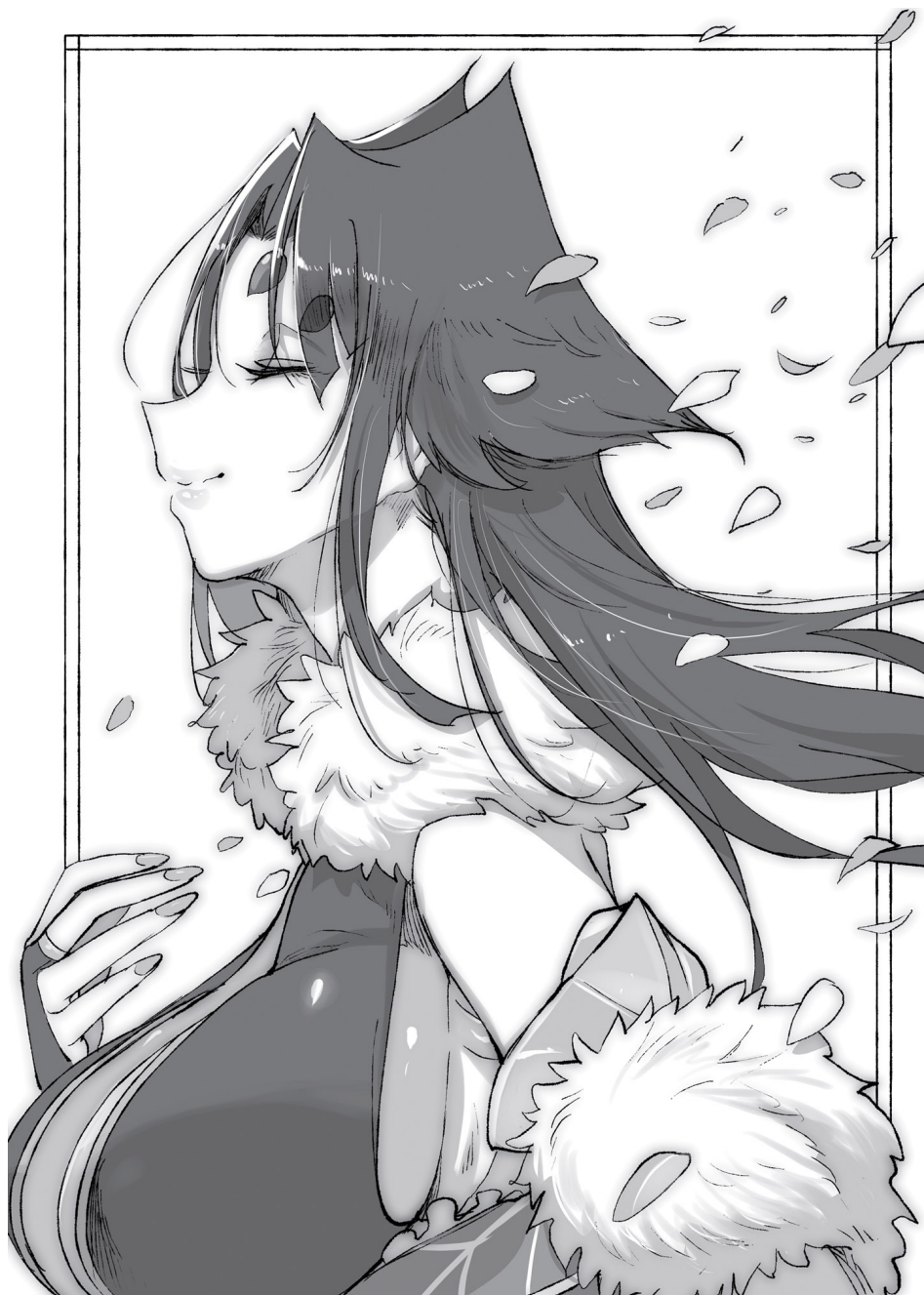
Arahnia ripped up the advertisement, shredding it neatly and methodically into tiny pieces, as if to prove to herself that she didn't care about the message.

"Too bad, Ma."

She didn't actually know if her mother could hear her, but was sure her parting words would reach her somehow.

"Doc said he'd always be by my side...and I've decided to trust him. I won't be going to find you."

Arahnia tossed the scraps of paper, which mixed with the falling cherry blossoms. The cherry blossoms, in full bloom, swept away the pieces of her discarded letter.



Even if her mother did happen to find her, she would be with Glenn forever. That was why she wasn't scared.

"Heh..." Arahnia picked up a gourd she had borrowed. Inside it was alraune sake.

"Arahnia, we're going to leave soon," Sapphee said as she slithered up to her.

"What are you doing here? Are you having a picnic under the flowers with sake?" Tisalia also ran up, her hooves clip-clopping on the ground.

"Heh, just a cup. Isn't it wonderful?"

"No way, you'll get seasick."

"Yeah. Just a sip then," Arahnia said, taking a swig from the gourd.

"What were you doing?" Sapphee asked. Arahnia thought she had sharp eyes.

"Nothin'. Nothin' to tell the first wife about."

"Now you're just being nasty. Stop it."

"Oh. I was serious, though," Arahnia teased, smiling.

She was done with claiming she'd be happy as a mistress, but she did hope Glenn would make Sapphee his priority. The way Arahnia saw it, she loved how Glenn was loved by Sapphee and how he loved her back.

Perhaps she was more complicated than even she had thought.

"You're acting suspicious..."

"You're imagining it."

"You're not hiding anything are you? That reminds me, I wanted to ask you something. About your kiss with Dr. Glenn. What was it like? I want every detail!" Sapphee demanded.

The three of them continued chatting as they headed toward the ship.

"That's between me and the Doc."

"Arahnia!"

"There's nothing to say. You were watching the whole time."

“That’s completely different,” Sapphee yelled. “I’ve never kissed anyone. Ahhh...”

Just then, someone popped their head out of the sea with a splash.

“I heard someone say kiss!”

“Lulala?!”

“What happened? Did someone kiss Dr. Glenn?” Lulala was smiling, eyes wide. “Actually, you know...I think I was the first one to kiss Dr. Glenn. Right?”

“N-no! That was emergency medical treatment!”

“Huh? But Arahnia, you kissed him too, right?”

“So you’ve been listening the entire time?!”

Lulala stuck out her tongue and clicked it. Arahnia realized this girl also had eyes everywhere. She’d intended to lift Sapphee up from the start, but what about Lulala? She could be a capable rival, from Sapphee’s perspective.

“We finally have the blessing of Glenn’s parents, so we can start talking about the wedding. Are we going to have three? Or four?”

“We don’t have that sort of budget. We have to pay back the loan for the clinic.”

“Ah yes, he has that debt.”

The clinic still had a long way to go financially. Arahnia decided she’d work hard to support Glenn, as his wife.

“Hey, hey, Sapphee.”

“What is it, Arahnia?” Sapphee responded halfheartedly, preoccupied with the threat of another rival.

Arahnia moved her lips close to Sapphee’s ear and whispered, “Kissing Doc was great.”

“Arrrrgh! I’m going to have him do it once we’re back home!”

“Why don’t you do it now?”

“It has to be romantic!”

Sapphee sighed, while Tisalia looked envious. Glenn looked over, as if he finally noticed the noisy bunch.

“What’s going on? Did something happen?”

“Nothin’.” Arahnia feigned innocence, taking another swig of sake from the gourd. A cherry blossom petal fluttered past her eyes.

The best season of her life had only just begun.

Afterword

HELLO EVERYONE, Yoshino Origuchi here.

I think the *Monster Girl Doctor* anime will have just started airing just around when Volume 8 came out (in Japan).

But let me start with the pandemic.

An unprecedented coronavirus pandemic has taken the world by storm.

As someone who has always struggled with being unsociable, shutting myself away from the world and lurking in the shadows, it hasn't really had a huge effect on my personal life. But with the editorial department working remotely, people staying out of bookstores, and the impact all that has had on the animation studio, it has definitely affected my work.

I hope all my readers are taking the necessary precautions to stay safe. I'm writing this afterword in May 2020, and there is no telling what will happen two months from now—but thanks to the hard work of the editor and everyone else involved, Volume 8 will be on shelves.

Follow Dr. Glenn's advice: Wash your hands, gargle, sanitize, and wear a mask! Actually, he never said that. I just made him say it in this afterword. Please take care of yourselves.

Now, Volume 8 was full of unwholesome acts committed by Aluloona. It can't be helped. But you liked it, right? An orgy...no, no, it was just group blooming. And self-pollination. It's not sexual at all.

I wonder how it will look in the anime?

I want to thank everyone who has continued to work with me and taken measures to cope with it all. Many anime events were canceled due to the pandemic. Apparently, it's even affected the rest of the world, where there are plenty of *Monster Girl* fans.

I pray that the broadcast will go according to schedule.

There are too few pages in this volume, you say?! That's why I have such a long message of gratitude prepared!

Editor Hibi-u-san! Thank you very much for your hard work on the anime!

Illustrator Z-ton-sensei! Your unwholesome Aluloona was incredible!

Manga creator Thomas Kanemaki-sensei! Thank you for staying on this project!

And thank you to the entire anime staff. And the entire cast. Thank you very much. It's all thanks to you that we were able to create this product.

Also, thank you to all of the artists who talk to me. I'm talking about the manga artists and illustrators on Twitter, S-BOW, the owner of Jingai Only and its entire staff, and everyone working at bookstores throughout the country. Thank you to the *Comic Ryu* reps and editorial staff, and my family, whom I haven't seen much since I left home. Thank you to the proofreaders who find every teeny tiny mistake, and all of you readers. I am forever grateful.

Maybe the younger characters will show up in the next volume? Or maybe they won't.

Huh? You want more Skadi? Well, she's definitely not young...

—Yoshino Origuchi

About the Author, Yoshino Origuchi

After ten years as an author, his work is finally becoming an anime. That's thanks to the support of all of you. Thank you very much. The work is based on a special inclination, but I hope you will watch the anime, too.

About the Illustrator, Z-ton

The color pages in this version definitely don't follow the 3 C's, but they're wearing masks, so I'm sure it's fine! (Although it was just a coincidence.) There seem to be many characters with the same figure, but I do like how they look nice and non-human.



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